

## APPENDIX

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### TWO UNPUBLISHED LECTURES BY LEO STRAUSS

## THE LIVING ISSUES OF GERMAN POSTWAR PHILOSOPHY (1940)

### Introductory remark

Both the intellectual glory and the political misery of the Germans may be traced back to one and the same cause: German civilisation is considerably *younger* than the civilisation of the West. The Germans are, strictly speaking, less civilized than the English and the French, i.e., they are to a lesser degree citizens, *free* citizens. This is one aspect of the matter. The other aspect is that German philosophy is more apt to take a critical attitude towards civilisation, towards the *tradition* of civilisations, than Western philosophy is.<sup>2</sup> We may go so far as to say that, 'generally speaking,'<sup>1</sup> German philosophy *implies* a more or less radical criticism of the very idea of civilisation and especially of modern civilisation – a criticism disastrous in the political field, but necessary in the philosophical, in the theoretical field. For if civilisation is distinguished from, and even opposed to, what was formerly called the state of nature, the process of civilisation means an increasing going away from the *natural* condition of man, an increasing *forgetting* of that situation. And perhaps one must have a living knowledge,<sup>3</sup> an acute recollection<sup>3</sup> of that situation if one wants to know, i.e. to understand in its full meaning, the *natural*, the basic problems of philosophy.

Criticism of modern civilisation is related to a longing for some past, for some antiquity. An English acquaintance of mine told me that what struck him most, and what was most incomprehensible to him, when he was talking to Germans, was their longing for their tribal past. Now, longing for the

Teutonic past is only the most crude and unintelligent, the most ridiculous<sup>1</sup> form of a<sup>5</sup> deep dissatisfaction with modern civilisation. In its most enlightened form, it is a longing for classical antiquity, especially for Greek antiquity. In a famous aphorism, Nietzsche has described German thought as one great attempt to build a bridge leading back from the modern world to the world of Greece. One has only to recall the names of Leibniz, Lessing,<sup>1</sup> Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin and Hegel to see that Nietzsche's remark is based on some evidence. This much is certain: Nietzsche's own philosophy, the most powerful single factor in German postwar philosophy, is almost identical with his criticism of modern civilisation in the name of classical antiquity.

The backbone of modern civilisation is modern *science*. German criticism of modern civilisation is therefore primarily criticism of modern science, either in the form of a limitation of its bearing or in a still more radical form. That criticism was expressed by the German philosophic movement of the end of the 18th and of the beginning of the 19th century, by the movement culminating in Hegel, in the form of the opposition of *history* as the realm of *freedom* vs. *nature* as the realm of (mathematical or mechanical) *necessity*, or of the opposition of organic growth or dialectical process vs. rational construction. This interpretation of the criticism of modern<sup>6</sup> civilisation naturally was an important factor in German postwar philosophy. But it was not *characteristic* of the latter. The slogan which expressed the attitude characteristic of postwar Germany towards modern civilisation, is, *not* history vs. unhistorical naturalism, or the grown vs. the made, *but* life or existence vs. science, science being *any* purely theoretical enterprise. The science criticized<sup>7</sup> in the name of life or existence, comprises both natural science and history.<sup>11</sup> The German postwar criticism is directed as much against Hegel and romanticism as

I "Kritik so verstanden, Gelehrsamkeit so betrieben, ist der Weg, auf dem Leibniz der geworden ist, der er ist, und der *einzig* Weg, auf dem ein denkender und fleissiger Mann sich ihm nähern kann." ["Critique understood in such a way, scholarship pursued in such a way, is the path on which Leibniz became the man he is and is the *sole* path on which a thinking and industrious man can approach him."]

II Nietzsche's 2. *Unzeitgemässe*.

against Descartes. The originator of that criticism was Nietzsche who had made it its principle to look at science from the point of view of art, and to look at art from the point of view of life.<sup>1</sup>

As is implied in what I have already said, German postwar philosophy is only to a certain extent postwar-philosophy. The large majority of the older generation and a considerable part of the younger generation naturally continued traditions which had been established in the 19th century or earlier without being disturbed by the upheaval of the war and of its aftermath. We may call this type of men the merely academic philosophers. Public opinion of postwar Germany was determined not by them, but by those men who were in contact with the revolution of thought – either as its exponents or as its originators –, by thinkers who felt that the traditions of the 19th century *could* not be continued and did not *deserve* to be continued. Of these thinkers one may distinguish two kinds: thinkers who had a direct and revolutionizing effect on the more open-minded and excitable part of the academic youth, and thinkers who in relative secrecy discovered, or rediscovered, a basis more in accordance with the nature of things than that underlying the preceding<sup>8</sup> period had been. For the purpose of a general discussion, I believe it to be better if I limit myself to a reasoned sketch of the more superficial movements which, however, were<sup>9</sup> influenced by, and influencing in their<sup>10</sup> turn, the deeper movement, that deeper movement being practically identical with the development of phenomenology. In doing this, I shall base myself not only and not even mainly on printed books or articles. Certain lectures and conversations and discussions which I remember, revealed to me the tendencies of the world in which I then was living, much better than the so-called final statements which I could read later on in print.

<sup>1</sup>One more word before I start: I speak of what *other people* thought – I do not necessarily approve of these thoughts – but my purpose is exclusively to give you sound information.<sup>1</sup>

The intellectual situation of Germany immediately after the war shows itself most clearly in two memorable publications: Spengler's *Decline of the West* and Max Weber's *Science and Learning as a Vocation*. The meaning of these publications

may be described as follows: Spengler's work was a most ruthless attack on the validity or the value of modern science and philosophy (and indeed of science and philosophy altogether), and Weber's public lecture was the most impressive defence, offered in postwar Germany, of modern science and philosophy.

### **I. Radical historicism and the impulse toward radical historical understanding, toward interpretation of texts**

a) To appreciate the bearing of Spengler's teaching, one must remind oneself of the original claim of modern science and philosophy: they originally had<sup>1</sup> claimed to teach *the* truth, the truth valid for all men and indeed for all intelligent beings (Voltaire's *Micromégas*). That science and philosophy was declared by Spengler to be no more than the expression of a specific soul, of a specific *culture*, the Faustic culture –, and only one form of its self-expression, no less but no more significant than art, economy, strategy and what not. The claim of mathematic[s] and logic, e.g., to be absolutely true was dismissed: there is no logic or mathematic[s], but there are various logics and mathematics in accordance with the variety of cultures to which they belong. The same holds naturally true of ethics. Modern science or philosophy is no more *true* than, say, the<sup>1</sup> Chinese system of administration.

The only consequence which a theoretical man, a philosopher, could draw from this was that *the* task of philosophy is to understand the various cultures<sup>11</sup> as expressions of their souls. This would be certainly more philosophic than to elaborate still further modern logic, e.g., modern logic being nothing other than the expression of a specific soul. Spengler as it were replaced theory of knowledge or metaphysics by the understanding of the souls producing the various cultures, of these souls which are the *roots* of all "truth."<sup>1</sup>

2 recto

The understanding of cultures naturally has a standard of *truth*. But it does not claim to be *absolutely* true. For whatever truth may be – it certainly must be meaningful. Now, historical studies are not meaningful for, they are not even understandable to, cultures other than the Faustic culture: historical

truth, the most radical truth, we might say: the only truth left, *exists* exclusively for Faustic man.

b) Prepared by the idealistic interpretation of science:

α) if reason does not *discover* the laws of nature, but if it is reason which *prescribes* [to] nature its laws, truth is the *product* of reason. Reason has its *history*. And that history is not necessarily determined by the exigencies of reason itself.

β) Science consists in organizing sense-data – but there are various ways of organizing sense-data – Newton and Goethe (Cassirer) – Simmel's various "planes."

c) Spengler seemed to represent the extreme of historicism; but it was soon seen<sup>12</sup> that he had not gone to the end of his way.

α) The philosophic deficiency of Spengler's teaching: it required as its basis an elaborate philosophy of man, of human existence as being essentially historical; a philosophy showing that man as *the* historical being is the origin of all meaning; and this presupposed an analysis of truth, an analysis showing that truth is essentially relative to human existence. Such a philosophy was elaborated by *Heidegger*.

β) Spengler had emphasized certain features common to *all* cultures: static (art, science, politics, religion) and dynamic (growth including decay) laws of culture, we may say. He had thus acknowledged the distinction between the essence of culture as such and the peculiar features of the individual culture, between unhistorical and historical elements of culture. But is it possible to make such a<sup>1</sup> distinction, as it is implied in the use of the very term "culture"? Is not "everything" historical? Is not the most abstract categorical system still historical, applicable to one culture only? More precisely: are the categories used by Spengler, really applicable to the phenomena which he tries to interpret? If it is crazy to interpret Brutus in terms of the French revolution, it is still more crazy for a historicist to talk of Greek *states*, of Greek *religion* etc., i.e. to apply categories which are not Greek to Greek phenomena. If it is true that each "culture" is unique, it has a categorical system of its own, and that system must be discovered out of the phenomena of that culture itself. We must then study the various cultures directly, and not, as Spengler largely had done, the *literature* on these cultures. We must



study the *documents*. This, however, primarily means *interpreting texts*<sup>13</sup>, seeing that the interpretation of other documents, e.g. statues<sup>14</sup>, is much more open to subjective interpretation than are explicit statements.

Thus Spengler gave to historical studies an infinitely greater significance than they previously had<sup>1</sup> had. For he had practically reduced philosophy itself to understanding of the historical phenomena. '(Prewar historicism had acknowledged at least logic and theory of knowledge as nonhistorical disciplines.)'<sup>1</sup> It was<sup>15</sup> now no longer historians, but philosophers who studied the past with no other interest than to understand the past.

γ) If philosophy is reduced for one moment to understanding texts, the philosophic interest has to be focussed on the phenomena of interpretation, generally speaking: of understanding other people's thoughts. That is to say: *hermeneutics* takes on a central significance. Study of hermeneutics, of the principles underlying understanding ≠ explaining paves the way for a philosophy as an attempt to *understand* the phenomena, as distinguished from a philosophy which attempts to *explain* the phenomena. |

2 verso

δ) The turning to the texts themselves implies a profound distrust of the initial categories of interpretation, of the categories we use before having *submitted* ourselves to the 'test of the<sup>1</sup> past. That distrust is directed especially against the term "culture" which is the product of the<sup>16</sup> Faustic soul. More elementary, less sophisticated terms are required if we want to give an accurate and adequate account of the thoughts and interests guiding the life of earlier people. 'We must get rid of the whole conceptual apparatus created by modern philosophy or science, and indeed by the older traditions of philosophy or science; we must return to a<sup>1</sup> pre-philosophic or a<sup>1</sup> pre-scientific language if we want to arrive at an adequate understanding of pre-philosophic "culture."<sup>1</sup>

Whoever tried seriously to understand the past along these lines discovered certain *basic* facts and interests which have *not* changed and which are not subject to change. Therewith the historical interest turned into a philosophic interest, into the interest in the eternal nature of man. And that turn was backed by historical studies as distinguished from a general

philosophy of history. Finally, it became clear that members of all "cultures", 'being *men*,<sup>1</sup> may understand each other, whereas the "Faustic" historicist understands none, because he does not see the eternal nature of man, 'because he does not see the wood for the trees.<sup>1</sup>

Besides, familiarity with earlier thought provides<sup>17</sup> the experience of the *practicability* of an essentially *unhistorical* approach: radical historicism awakes a passionate interest in the past and therewith a passionate interest in the<sup>18</sup> *unhistorical* approach characteristic of man up to the 18th century.

## II. Demand for evident justification of historical studies in general and of each individual historical study in particular

The assumption underlying the tendency under discussion is the view that philosophy is self-knowledge of man in his historicity. Such philosophy takes on the form of historical study. Philosophy or history thus understood is essentially and purely *theoretical*. Now, a purely theoretical approach to history is open to an objection which had been raised by Nietzsche in the '70s, in his essay "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben", but which was not appreciated very much before the war. The objection may be put this way: historical knowledge, as self-knowledge of man, as *reflection*, is dangerous to spontaneity; human life and human history are essentially spontaneous; therefore, the total victory of historical consciousness, of history *understood*, would be the end of history itself, of history *lived* or *done*. (If the philosophers of the past had been historians, there would be no history of philosophy. Or, the other way round: if we want to *understand* the philosophers of the past, we must be guided by the same basic interest which guided them: the interest in *the* truth, in the truth about the whole, and not 'the *historical* interest,' the interest in the opinions of other people). Historical consciousness ought then not to be left to itself, it ought to be limited by, and made subservient to, the forces which *make* history: historical studies ought to be in the service of *life*. Life means the *present*. Historical consciousness left to itself, historical consciousness ruling supreme, would mean the unlimited rule of the past over the present. The consequence is: we must



no longer take it for granted that historical knowledge and historical studies are useful, pleasant and necessary. For experience shows that mankind lived at almost all times without the famous historical sense ("the sixth sense").<sup>1</sup>

3 recto

Of course, we find historical interest, historiography, very early in the development of mankind. But never before the 18th century did history take on a *philosophic* significance. The view that history has such a significance – this view underlying the very term "philosophy of history" – has to be considered a *prejudice*, as long as we have not understood thoroughly why present-day life, why present-day philosophy, as distinguished from that of earlier periods, *needs* historical consciousness. And that *need*, that *necessity* has to be shown not merely in general, but, moreover, no individual historical study can be considered significant, if it is not undertaken with perfect clarity as to *its* "existential" necessity.

If radical historicism changed the character of historical studies profoundly<sup>19</sup>, in so far as it engendered a new *passion* for historical studies, indeed an *extreme* passion for such studies, Nietzsche's criticism of historicism (and also the philosophy of existence) enlightened that passion by compelling people to make perfectly clear to themselves the *motives* of historical studies in general and of each individual historical study in particular. It was apt to direct historical studies towards the interpretation of such texts as were relevant to the solution, or understanding, of our most urgent immediate problems. And it led up to the fundamental question of the meaning of historical consciousness by raising the question why and how far historical consciousness is a necessity.

### III. The reasons characteristic of our time which make historical consciousness a necessity

The question of the reason why and how far historical consciousness is a necessity, is itself a *historical* question. Nietzsche's question and answer had been unhistorical: he had explained out of human nature as such why *man* needs history. He naturally had seen that there is a basic difference between all earlier historical interest and that radical historical interest which had developed since the 18th century.<sup>20</sup>

He had *objected* to that radical historical interest; but he had not attempted to *understand* the *necessity* underlying it. Thus, Nietzsche's question had to be made more precise: why does *modern* man need historical studies, why is *modern* man compelled to be historically minded in a way in which no earlier age had been? Why do *we* need history?

Three answers were given to that question.

a) Human life is essentially historical, i.e., man naturally needs a *tradition* which guides him, which makes possible communication and mutual understanding. *The* tradition, the tradition based upon Greek science and Biblical religion, had been gradually undermined since the 16th century. For modern man attempted to be free from all prejudices, i.e. from all traditions. But the fact that man does need tradition is shown by this, that the very same modern man who undermined all traditions was compelled to take refuge in history: history is the modern surrogate for tradition. |

b) It is not true that modern man has no tradition; each generation necessarily grows up in a tradition, even if it grows up in a tradition of anti-traditionalism. Tradition is *always* a decisively determining *power*. That power cannot be disposed of by a decision to doubt once in one's life one's prejudices; Descartes' fate shows clearly that such a wholesale liberation from the prejudices does not work; to<sup>21</sup> free our minds from the shackles of tradition which prevent us from looking at things with our own eyes, in an unbiased and independent way, we must first *know* the power we are up against; we cannot get rid of the prejudices but after having *understood* them from their roots, from their *historical* roots. Now, it would be an error to assume that the destruction of tradition, attempted since Descartes, actually achieved its purpose. It could not achieve its purpose, because its attack on *tradition* was bound up with belief in actual or possible *progress*. Now, progress at its best is the establishment of a true and sound tradition, but at any rate the establishment of a new *tradition*. For "progress" means that certain questions, the *basic* questions can be settled once and for all, so that the answers to these questions can be taught to children, so that the subsequent generations simply can build up on the solutions found out by earlier generations, without bothering any longer about the basic questions.

3 verso

I.e.: “progress” implies that the answers to the basic questions can be taken for granted, that they can be permitted to become *prejudices* for all generations after that of the founding fathers. Accordingly, the process of intellectual development during the modern centuries consists in this, that each generation *reacts* to the preceding generation and to the preceding generation *only*, without raising the question whether the whole basis on which the discussion takes place – that basis discovered by the founding fathers – is valid. Hegel’s view that the historical process is a sequence of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, a sequence which necessarily brings to light the truth, is only an expression of the actual procedure of the modern centuries. That process may be sketched as follows: Descartes attacks and refutes late scholasticism, Locke refutes Descartes, Berkeley refutes Locke, Hume<sup>III</sup> refutes Berkeley, Kant refutes Hume, Hegel refutes Kant etc.; but the foundation laid by Descartes is never truly tested, because the root of the pre-modern position, the philosophy of Aristotle, the alleged refutation of which is the basis of modern philosophy, is never adequately discussed. For all discussions of Aristotle make use of modern conceptions, of conceptions the use of which decides beforehand the outcome of the discussion.

Robert Musil in his novel *The Man Without Qualities* expressed the criticism of the then still prevalent view by saying that the process of history, far from being guided by the exigencies of reason, actually is a process of muddling through (“Weiterwurschteln”). The outcome of a discussion depends, not on reason, but on “history,” and the verdicts of history are what we believe to be established truths. To counteract that tendency, a radical revision at least of the causes célèbres, allegedly<sup>1</sup> decided by *history*, is indispensable. And *we* are in need of such a revision much more than the former generations, since | the anti-traditionalism characteristic of modern thought is apt to make us blind to the fact that we are the *heirs* of a *tradition* of anti-traditionalism, and since historical research shows us more and more how much we still are under the spell of the medieval *tradition* of Aristoteli[ani]sm

1 recto

III His criticism of causality takes into account exclusively Hobbes, Clarke and Locke – not: Aristotle.

and Biblical *authority*. The *ballast* of tradition has *not* become *smaller* since the days of Descartes, it has become *greater*.

c) Historical studies are the most urgent necessity, if present day man does not happen to *know* of fundamental facts which were known to earlier generations, in other words, if we have *teachers* in the past and none in our time. Historical studies are necessary because of the *bankruptcy* of modern man. That bankruptcy was asserted by a large number of people – it implied a less fatalistic view of the same facts which had given birth to the title “Decline of the West.” To mention one example only: Yorck von Wartenburg in his correspondence with Dilthey which was published in 1926, had said: modern man is finished and just fit to be buried; the movement which had begun in the Renaissance or earlier, has come to its close; enthusiastic pupils of Heidegger said that *Martin* Heidegger marks the end of the epoch which was opened by another Martin, Martin Luther. The feeling<sup>22</sup> that we were witnessing an end, that modern man was at his wit’s end, was the most important motive for historical studies, for a turning to the thought of the past. “We are sold out completely as regards knowledge – we know nothing – this ignorance of ours is then, and then only, not utterly unbearable if we are willing to *learn* something; i.e. if we are willing to open the old in-folios, to *read* – but to read not with that astonishing detachment and indifference with which the preceding generations used to read those books, but with the consuming interest of him who wants to be taught, who wants to receive a teaching” (Ebbinghaus).

In a less dogmatic form, that view may be expressed as follows: it is after all *possible* that the truth, or the right approach to the truth, has been found in a remote past and *forgotten* for<sup>23</sup> centuries.

#### IV. The bankruptcy of the present: the turning from reason to authority

The bankruptcy of modern man seemed to become obvious in the crisis of modern science. The expression *Grundlagenkrisis* (crisis of the foundations of all sciences and studies) became a slogan. Of course, the existence of such a crisis was denied with

regard to the continuing progress of the natural sciences as well as of historical research. But the critics of modern science pointed to the fact that science as a whole had lost that *significance*, that *human significance* which it certainly had [had] up to the end of the 19th century and even up to the last war. The controversy over Darwin's *Origin of Species* had been of immediate concern to every thinking person; even the controversy over du Bois-Reymond's *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis* had a wide echo; but the scientific discoveries of postwar time (except those of immediate bearing on technology and medicine) were important only to specialists.

The enormous loss of prestige which science, the scientific spirit, had suffered, revealed itself nowhere more clearly than in the most significant *defence*, offered in postwar Germany, of the scientific spirit: Max Weber's *Science and Learning as a Vocation*. Weber had an unusually high qualification to state the case of traditional science before the younger generation: he enjoyed a very high reputation as a scholar (he was not merely a theoretician of the social sciences, but he had enriched the social sciences themselves) as well as a teacher, and he understood the aspirations as well as the frustrations of the younger generation. During the turmoil of the year 1919, when the thinking part of the academic youth was more eager than ever before the war for genuine *knowledge*, for real *science* as regards the basic principles or ends of human actions, Weber declared that no science of that kind is possible, that no genuine *knowledge* of the true aims of human life can be expected of science or philosophy. To the question of what the more than technical meaning of science or scholarship or philosophy is, Weber gave this answer: the views that science etc. is the way to the true being or to nature or to God or to happiness, are "illusions" which no one but "great children" can accept any longer. Science can teach us many things as regards the *means* leading to the various ultimate ends which are possible; it can even elucidate the *meaning* of these ends or values; but it cannot settle the conflicts between the different values: which value of the various conflicting values is to be preferred, *cannot* be said by science or philosophy. The conflict which cannot be settled by *argument*, must be settled by the free *decision* of every individual. This is, according to



Weber, the distinction between the man of science and the prophet: that the prophet can and must recommend on the basis of his decision what he considers to be the right aim, whereas the man of science must refrain from any such recommendation. Weber went to the end of this way by asserting that science or philosophy, far from being able to settle the fundamental question of the right life of man as man, is itself ultimately based on an "irrational" decision: the opposition to the scientific spirit, to the scientific approach as such, cannot be *refuted*<sup>24</sup>, cannot be shown to be absurd, by *science*.

Weber's thesis amounted to this: that reason and argument are intrinsically incapable of giving to life a real guidance. Reason and argument cannot bridge the gulf which separates the different groups each of which is guided by a star, a value-system, of its own. Now, every human community needs some degree of agreement at least as regards the basic moral questions. Such an agreement may be supplied by a tradition; but in Germany, traditions were losing their force more and more. If reason and argument are incapable of supplying people with the minimum of mutual understanding required for living together,<sup>25</sup> if mutual understanding as regards the practical basis of common life cannot be reached by reason and argument, people had no choice but to turn away from reason to *authority*.

The most visible kind of authority – most visible at least in Germany – is the *State*. In an essay *Der Begriff des Politischen* (What is political?), Carl Schmitt indicated the following chain of thought: there is not one ideal, but a variety of conflicting ideals; therefore, ideals cannot have an obligatory character; more precisely, any value judgment is a free decision, which concerns exclusively the freely deciding individual himself; it is essentially a private affair; therefore, no one can expect of any other man that that other man sacrifice<sup>26</sup> anything for the first man's ideal; but no political community can exist without asserting that there are *obligations* which can overrule any private decision; whatever may be the ultimate source of these obligations, they cannot be derived from free decisions of the individual, or else they could be no more than *conditional* obligations, not *absolute* obligations, the obligation to sacrifice life itself. For, Schmitt asserts, if we analyse political

obligation, and above all the meaning of “political,” we find that we mean by “political” any fact which is related to the distinction of friend and enemy of the group to which we belong, that distinction originating in the possibility of *war*. The basic fact of the possibility of war sets an absolute limit to all freedom of decision: it creates *authority* and therewith it gives all members of the community a generally valid guidance. †

5 recto

A more radical expression of this view is to be found in an essay by Ernst Jünger “On pain” (in: *Blätter und Steine*). Jünger asserts that in our period all faiths and ideals of earlier times have lost their force and evidence. Consequently, all standards with reference to which we can judge ourselves and others are no longer valid. But there is one standard left: the ability or inability to stand pain, physical pain. Fortitude or courage is the only virtue which is still evident, the only virtue left – and this not without reason: ἀνδρεία is *the* original virtue.

However highly people might think of the State, the remembrance was not lost that the State can never be an *absolute* authority. An absolute authority must be superhuman, the authority of God. Since the beginning of this century, people had spoken of a religious revival after the positivistic indifference of the 19th century. That revival was always accompanied by the opinion that an unreserved return to the teaching of the Bible was impossible, because of the achievements of modern science and criticism. After the war, however, such an unreserved return to the Bible as the document of *revelation* became a serious possibility for many people. The age-old distrust of revelation and theology was replaced by a distrust of religion. A remarkable philosophic writer of predominantly theological interest was fond of the fact that the very term “religion” did not occur once in his work. The belief that the unmodified and unmitigated teaching of the Bible had been refuted by modern science and criticism, lost its power. Karl Barth in particular insisted upon the fact that what had been refuted in the 17th and 18th centuries<sup>27</sup> was a weak kind of apologetics, but never the doctrine of Calvin and Luther themselves.

The development under discussion may be described in the following terms: [the] theory of knowledge had raised the question of what science is. It had *not* raised the more

fundamental question of Nietzsche "Why science?" The question "why science" <sup>28</sup>seems to imply<sup>28</sup> that there is a standard higher than science with reference to which science as such can be judged. According to Nietzsche, that standard is "life." But life, human life, is not intrinsically superior to science, human science: the philosopher is always free to answer "pereat vita, vivat philosophia," and therewith to reject the authority of "life." The 'evidently necessary' question "why science" becomes compelling<sup>29</sup> only with regard to something which is superior to everything human: the question "why science" calls science before the tribunal of the authority of revelation. Science is not necessary: man may choose it or reject it (this is implied in the very question "why science?"). An absolute necessity cannot be found but in divine command.

The inability of modern science or philosophy to give man an evident teaching as regards the fundamental question, the question of the right life, led people to turn from science or reason to authority, to the authority of the State or the authority of Revelation. Politics and theology, as distinguished from science of all kind[s], appeared to be much more closely connected with the basic interests of man as man than science *and all culture*: the political community and the word of the living God are basic; compared with them everything else is derived and relative. "*Culture*" is superseded by politics and theology, by "*political theology*." We have travelled a long road away from Spengler.

In that situation, a pupil of Max Weber, Karl Mannheim, made an attempt to save argument and reason against the doubt, expressed by his teacher, that argument and reason are incapable of leading<sup>30</sup> to agreement as regards the fundamentals. Mannheim believed that such an agreement could be reached on the basis of the fact that all divergent opinions worth considering are related to, or produced by, the *present situation*. Consciousness of our belonging to the same situation may lead to a solution of our most urgent problem: discussion between the various opposed groups leads to a dialectic synthesis of the divergent opinions. This suggestion, if meant as a philosophic and not merely as a political suggestion, (and there is reason for believing that it *was* meant to be a philosophic suggestion) seems to be absurd: a dialectic

5 verso

synthesis of atheism and theism, e.g., cannot even be imagined. Mannheim probably would answer that theism is today nothing<sup>31</sup> more than an obsolete ideology, | since it is not genuinely related to the present situation. At any rate, this *was* asserted by many people: Nietzsche's statement that the greatest event in the recent history of Europe is the death of God was explicitly or implicitly adopted by a considerable number of writers (Spengler, Scheler, Hartmann, Heidegger). According to that view, the present age is the first radically atheistic epoch in the history of mankind. Thus, reflection on the specific character of the present age leads indeed to the discovery of an ideal potentially common to all present-day men or at least Europeans. That ideal 'which is' in accordance with the characteristic assumption of our time will be an atheistic morality.

The new atheism is opposed not only to the belief in a personal God and to pantheism, but equally to the *morality* of the Bible, to the belief in progress, in human brotherhood and equality, in the dignity of man as man, in short to all moral standards which, <sup>32</sup>as it believed,<sup>32</sup> lose their meaning once they are separated from their religious basis. – Also: the new atheism does no longer believe (as the Greeks did) in the κόσμος: therefore the attitude, underlying Greek science, of admiring the κάλλιστος κοσμος is replaced by the attitude of courage and Standhalten. – Moreover: 19th century atheism had tried to replace God by mankind or man; it thus had deified man, who, however, is a finite being. The new atheism insists on the finiteness of men: deification of mankind is no genuine atheism.

People<sup>33</sup> were then confronted with an atheism, much more radical than e.g. Marxist atheism can be, on the one hand, and 'an attempt at' a restoration of the belief in Divine revelation on the other. That is to say, they<sup>34</sup> were confronted with a situation which had not existed in Europe for<sup>35</sup> many generations. Naturally, their<sup>36</sup> conceptual instruments (if I may say so) were utterly insufficient to tackle the new or rather old problems. It was hard not to see that the question of the existence or non-existence of a personal God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, was a serious question, more serious even than the question of the right method of the social sciences. If



the question should be answered, if it should even be understood as a meaningful question, one had to go back to an age when it was in the center of discussion – i.e. to Pre-Kantian philosophy.

For: 1) atheism was no longer proved – it was asserted that God is dead, i.e. that people no longer believe in the Biblical God – which is clearly no proof. For the view<sup>37</sup> that Biblical belief had been “refuted” by modern science and criticism presupposed<sup>38</sup> belief in that science and criticism, a belief utterly shattered in the period in question.

2) as regards Biblical theology of Gogarten, Rosenzweig etc.: it was no longer the Biblical theology of the Bible or of Calvin and Luther – was it then a Biblical theology at all?

Return to the philosophy of the Enlightenment, or more precisely to the philosophy of the 17th and 18th centuries<sup>39</sup>, seemed to be recommended by yet another consideration. The urgency of a convincing, generally valid moral teaching, of a moral teaching of evident political relevance, was clearly felt. Such a moral teaching seemed to be discernible in the natural law doctrines of the 17th and 18th centuries<sup>39</sup> rather than in later teaching[s]. (Troeltsch had asserted time and again that the political superiority of the Anglosaxons was due to the fact that that natural law tradition had not been superseded, to the same extent as in Germany, by historicism.) For the natural law teachers of the 17th and 18th centuries had spoken of laws and obligations, and not merely of ideals and values. |

## V. The return to reason and the final liberation from historicism

6 recto

The tendencies just mentioned imply, as you doubtless have noticed, a *reaction* to the defeatism which had led to the turning from reason to authority. But that reaction, that return to sanity, was *not* a return to 19th century or 20th century positivism or neo-Kantianism. That positivism and neo-Kantianism was inseparable from the belief in progress and therewith from a philosophy of history. It was as inseparable from a



philosophy of history as was its opponent (authoritarianism and historicism). But the rationalism posterior to historicism returned from Turgot and his pupils to Montesquieu or the 17th century philosophers. For that new rationalism was engaged in the quest for *eternal* truths and *eternal* standards, and it clearly realized that eternal truths and eternal standards are indifferent in themselves to any theory as to the sequence in which they are discovered or put into practice. "History" became again the realm of *chance*; i.e. "history" ceased to be a realm of its own, a field in the way in which nature is said to be a field. Historicism was about to be overcome definitely.

Let me explain this somewhat more fully. The view that truth is eternal and that there are eternal standards, was contradicted by historical consciousness, i.e. by the opinion that all "truths" and standards are necessarily relative to a given historical situation, and that, consequently, a mature philosophy can raise no higher claim than that to express the spirit of the period to which it belongs. Now, historical consciousness is not a revelation; it claims to be *demonstrably* superior to the unhistorical earlier view. But what does the historicist really *prove*? In the best case, that all attempts hitherto made by man to discover *the* truth about the universe, about God, about the right aim of human life, have not led to a generally accepted doctrine. Which is clearly not a proof that the question of *the* truth about the universe, about God, about the right aim of human life is a meaningless question. The historicist may have proved that in spite of all the efforts made by the greatest men, we do not know the truth. But what does this mean more than that<sup>1</sup> philosophy, quest for truth, is as necessary as ever? What else does it mean but that no man, and still less no sum of men, is wise, σοφός, but only, in the best case, φιλοσοφός? Historicism refutes all systems of philosophy – by doing this, it does the cause of philosophy the greatest service: for a system of philosophy, a system of *quest* for truth, is non-sense. In other words, historicism mistakes the unavoidable *fate* of all philosophers who, being men, are apt to err<sup>10</sup>, for a refutation of the *intention* of philosophy. Historicism is in the best case a proof of our *ignorance* – of which we are aware without historicism – but by not deriving from the insight into our ignorance the urge

to seek for knowledge, it betrays a lamentable or ridiculous self-complacency; it shows that it is just one dogmatism among the many dogmatisms which it may have debunked. |

Philosophy in the original meaning of the word presupposes the liberation from historicism. I say, the *liberation* from it, and not merely its<sup>41</sup> refutation. Refutations are cheap and usually not worth the paper on which they are written; for they do not require that the refuting writer has *understood* the ultimate motives of the adversary. The liberation from historicism requires that historical consciousness be<sup>42</sup> seen to be, not a self-evident premise, but a *problem*. And it necessarily is a *historical* problem. For historical consciousness is an opinion, or a set of opinions, which occurs only in a certain period. Historical consciousness is, to use the language of that consciousness, itself a *historical* phenomenon, a phenomenon which has come into being and which, therefore, is bound to pass away again. Historical consciousness will be superseded by something else.

6 verso

The historicist would answer: the only thing by which historical consciousness can be superseded is the new barbarism. As if historicism had not paved the way to that new barbarism. Historical consciousness is not such an impressive thing that something superior to it should be inconceivable.

What was<sup>43</sup> required was<sup>43</sup> that *history should be applied to itself*. Historical consciousness is itself the product of a historical process, of a process which is barely known and certainly never adequately, i.e. critically studied. I.e.: historical consciousness is the product of a *blind* process. We certainly ought not to accept the result of a blind process on trust. By bringing that process to light, we free ourselves from the power of its result. We become again, what we cannot be before, *natural* philosophers, i.e. philosophers who approach the natural, the basic and original question of philosophy in a natural, an adequate way.

## VI. Return to reason as a return to Plato and Aristotle

A return to reason *which implies or presupposes a critical analysis of the genesis of historical consciousness*, necessarily is a return to reason as reason was understood in pre-modern times.

For it would be a mistake to think that historical consciousness is a product of romanticism only. Romantic historical consciousness is only a correction of the historical consciousness of Enlightenment (criticism of the present vs. satisfaction with the present and its potentialities). At the very beginning of the modern period, in the 16th century, we observe for the first time the turning of *philosophers* to history as history ( $\neq$  facts recorded by historians). But when *studying* the genesis of historical consciousness, we *judge* it, we look at it with critical eyes: we <sup>44</sup>are in<sup>44</sup> the first steps and the imperfect beginnings of something wonderful, but the first step away from the right approach: for we know from experience the ultimate result<sup>45</sup> to which that first step led. I.e., when studying the genesis of historical consciousness, we look at it with the eyes of pre-modern philosophy – we stand on the other side of the fence. Only by doing this, shall we be enabled to find the *right* name of that which *we* call history (Geschichte  $\neq$  Historie).

Why has such a return become a necessity? In attempting to answer that question, I shall have to summarize a number of remarks which I made before in different connections. I

7 recto

Modern philosophy has come into being as a *refutation* of traditional philosophy, i.e. of the Aristotelian philosophy. Have the founders of modern philosophy *really* refuted Aristotle? Have they ever *understood* him<sup>46</sup>? They certainly understood the Aristotelians of their time, but they certainly did not understand Aristotle himself. But it might be said that the refutation not adequately done by the founding fathers, has been done in the meantime. By whom? He cannot have been *refuted*, if he has not been *understood*: And this was perhaps the most profound impression which the younger generation experienced in Germany during the period in question: under the guidance of Heidegger, people came to see that Aristotle and Plato had *not* been understood. Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle was an achievement with which I cannot compare any other<sup>47</sup> intellectual phenomenon which has emerged in Germany after the war. Heidegger made it clear, not by assertions, but by concrete analyses – the work of an enormous concentration and diligence – that Plato and Aristotle have *not* been understood by the modern philosophers; for they

read their own opinions into the works of Plato and Aristotle; they did not read them with the necessary zeal to know what Plato and Aristotle really meant, which *phenomena* Plato and Aristotle had in mind when talking of whatever they were talking [about]. And as regards the classical scholars, their<sup>48</sup> interpretations too<sup>1</sup> are utterly dependent on modern philosophy, since the way in which they *translate*, i.e. *understand*, the terms of Plato and Aristotle is determined by the influence on their mind of modern philosophy. For even a classical scholar is a modern man, and therefore under the spell of modern biases: and an adequate understanding of a pre-modern text requires, not merely knowledge of language and antiquities and the secrets of criticism, but also a constant *reflection* on the specifically modern assumptions which might<sup>1</sup> prevent us from understanding pre-modern thought, if we are not constantly on our guard. If Plato and Aristotle are not understood and consequently not refuted, return to Plato and Aristotle is an open possibility.

That possibility exercised a certain appeal on all people who had become dissatisfied with modern philosophy. For a return to scholasticism was not so much considered in Germany as it was in France. And this [was so] not only because Germany is predominantly Protestant, but also because the *derived* nature of scholasticism as compared with the *original* philosophy of Plato and Aristotle was too keenly felt.

Heidegger was not the only man who drew the attention of the younger generation to Greek antiquity as *the* truly classical period. Werner Jaeger's activity had a similar effect. I think it was in the environment of Jaeger that the term "third humanism" was coined. "Third humanism" would be a movement which continues in a most radical way the second humanism, the humanism of the German classics, of Schiller, e.g., who in his essay *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* had described the relation of the moderns to the ancients in these terms: the Greeks *were* nature, whereas for modern man, nature, being natural, is only an ought, an *ideal*; modern man<sup>49</sup> has a *longing* for what was *real* in Greece.

The discussion concerning science, concerning the specific features of the scientific approach, had led to <sup>50</sup>a point<sup>50</sup> where this general impression of what the Greeks were could

7 verso

take on a more definite meaning. It had been an implication of phenomenology to distinguish between the *scientific* view of [the] world (the view, elaborated by *modern* science) and the *natural* view of the world, the idea being that that natural view is prior to, and the<sup>1</sup> basis of, the scientific view: the scientific view of the world | emerges out of the natural view by virtue of a specific modification of approach. Now it became clear that that basic view, the starting point of the view elaborated by modern<sup>1</sup> science, more precisely: that the world as it is present for, and experienced by, that natural view, had been the subject of Plato's and Aristotle's analyses. Plato and Aristotle appeared to have discussed adequately what had *not* been discussed by the founders of modern philosophy, nor by their successors. For Hegel had indeed attempted to understand "the concrete," the phenomena themselves, but he had tried to "*construct*" them by starting from the "abstract." Whereas this was precisely the meaning of the Socratic turning: that science must *start* from the known, from the "known to us," from what is known in ordinary experience, and that science *consists* in *understanding* what is known indeed, but not understood adequately. (E.g. to deny motion, is "madness," for δῆλον ἐξ ἐπαγωγῆς; but τί ἔστι κίνησις – *that* is the question). Platonic and Aristotelian terms appeared to have a directness, and they appeared to have that direct relation to "impressions" which Hume had demanded and which he could not find, indeed, in the *modern* concept of cause and effect to which he limited his discussions – a directness, I say, absent from the modern concepts which all presuppose that *break*, effected by Descartes and continued by all his successors, with natural knowledge.<sup>IV</sup> Therefore, if we want to arrive at an adequate understanding

IV Cf., e.g. Hegel: "Im allgemeinen ist zu bemerken, dass das Denken sich auf den Standpunkt des Spinozismus gestellt haben muss; das ist der wesentliche Anfang alles Philosophierens. Wenn man anfängt zu philosophieren, so muss man zuerst Spinozist sein. Die Seele muss sich baden in diesem Äther der einen Substanz, in der alles, was man für wahr gehalten hat, untergegangen ist." ["In general it should be noted that thinking had to take the standpoint of Spinozism; that is the essential beginning of all philosophizing. If one begins to philosophize, then one has to be a Spinozist first. The soul has to bathe in the ether of the one substance in which everything that one has held to be true has perished."]



of the "natural" world, we simply have to *learn* from Plato and Aristotle.

But however this may be, whatever may be the final result of our studying Plato and Aristotle, whether or how far we can adhere ultimately to their analyses in all respects or not – what is decisively important is that we first learn to grasp their intention and then that their results be *discussed*. La querelle des anciens et des modernes must be renewed – it must be repeated with much greater fairness and greater *knowledge* than it was done in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle, which is not more than a beginning, would not have been possible without *Husserl's* phenomenology. As regards Husserl's work, I can only say that I believe that it surpasses in significance everything I know of, which was done in Germany in the last 50 years. Such an analysis as that of the transformation of geometry underlying Galileo's physics, as we find it in one of his latest publications, is the model for any analysis<sup>51</sup> concerning the basic assumptions of modern science and philosophy. |

But Husserl was not the only superior mind who was responsible for the great change we have been witnessing. At least as influential in this respect was the work of *Nietzsche*. Nietzsche changed the intellectual climate of Germany and perhaps of the whole continental Europe in a way similar to that in which Rousseau had changed that climate about 120 years before. And I do not think that a comparable change of the intellectual climate had occurred in the time between Nietzsche and Rousseau. The work of Nietzsche is as ambiguous as was that of Rousseau. And there is therefore a quite understandable difference of opinion as to what the real meaning of Nietzsche's work is. If I understand him correctly, his deepest concern was with philosophy, and not with politics ("philosophy and State are incompatible"); and that philosophy, in order to be really philosophy, and not some sort of dogmatism, is the sake of *natural* men,<sup>52</sup> of men capable and willing to live "under the sky," of men who do not need the shelter of the cave, of *anycave*. Such a cave, such an artificial<sup>53</sup> protection against the *elementary* problems, he descried, not only in

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the pre-modern tradition (of providence), but likewise in the modern tradition. It was against "history," against the belief that "history" can decide any question, that progress can ever make superfluous the discussion of the primary questions, against the belief that history, that indeed any human things, are the elementary subject of philosophy, that he reasserted hypothetically the doctrine of eternal return: to drive home that the elementary, the natural subject of philosophy still is, and always will be, as it had been for the Greeks: the κόσμος, the world.

### Text-Critical Notes

- [ ] contains additions by the editor.  
 <> indicates deletions by Leo Strauss.
1. Inserted or added by Leo Strauss between the lines or in the margins.
  2. Ms.: than is Western philosophy.
  3. [Insertion in ink in the margin. LS first wrote *an acute remembrance*. Then he made the correction in pencil: *recollection*.]
  4. the most < petty-bourgeois and > ridiculous
  5. < that >
  6. < western >
  7. < attacked >
  8. < preceded >
  9. < was >
  10. < its >
  11. cultures < and their >
  12. Ms.: seen soon
  13. < the > *texts*
  14. Ms.: statues e.g.
  15. Ms.: were
  16. < a specifically >
  17. Ms.: provides with
  18. < that >
  19. < radically >
  20. [Noted in the margin in pencil:] But see Nietzsche, 2nd *Unzeitgemässe*, p. 61.
  21. < to prev >
  22. < fact >
  23. Ms.: since
  24. *refuted* < by science >
  25. together, < people had no choice but to *turn away from reason to authority*. >

26. Ms.: sacrifices
27. Ms.: century
28. < implied >
29. compelling < and meaningful >
30. Ms.: incapable to lead
31. < no >
32. < allegedly >
33. < We >
34. < we >
35. Ms.: since
36. < our >
37. < fact >
38. < implied >
39. Ms.: century
40. < be mistaken >
41. < the >
42. Ms.: is
43. < is >
44. < observe >
45. < reason >
46. < that >
47. other < impression >
48. Ms.: they
49. Ms.: modern modern has
50. < a position >
51. < studies >
52. [The English formulation *is the sake of natural men* is explained and is to be understood as a rendering of the German expression *ist die Sache natürlicher Menschen*, is the task or subject matter of natural men.]
53. artificial < , if for all practical purposes necessary, >

## REASON AND REVELATION (1948)

### 1. *To clarify the issue, we replace "reason – revelation" by "philosophy – revelation."*

By the problem of reason and revelation I understand the problem of *philosophy* and revelation. "Reason" is neutral: the rights of reason <sup>2</sup>would seem to be <sup>2</sup>recognized by believers in revelation and by unbelievers alike. We rise above the level of neutrality, or of triviality, we enter the arena of conflict, if we confront revelation with a particular *interpretation* of reason – with the view that *the* perfection of reason and *therefore the* perfection of man is philosophy. *Philosophy* is incompatible with revelation: philosophy must try to *refute* revelation, and, if not revelation, at any rate theology must try to *refute* philosophy.

### 2. *Revelation must try to prove the absurdity of philosophy.*

Speaking as a non-theologian to theologians, I shall not presume to define *revelation*. Only one point must be made. Regardless of whether revelation is understood as revelation of a *teaching* or as a *happening*, the claim of revelation becomes noticeable first through a *teaching based* on revelation. Faith in revelation necessarily issues in preaching or proclaiming the message of revelation and therefore ultimately in a teaching – if in a teaching which always falls short of its task. Those who present that teaching cannot *disregard* the claim of philosophy which is incompatible with the claim of revelation. And they cannot leave it at <sup>1</sup> anathem[at]izing or at forbidding

Lecture to be delivered at Hartford (Theological Seminary) on January, 8, 1948.

philosophy: they have to refute its claims. This necessity creates a serious problem. If we assume on the basis of the account of the Fall that *the* alternative for man is philosophy *or* obedience to God's revelation, a refutation of philosophy would seem to be tantamount to a *proof* of the truth of revelation. But such a proof is considered by the most radical theologians as incompatible with the very idea of revelation. The response to revelation is faith, and faith is knowledge, if a particular kind of knowledge. Every attempt, not merely at *replacing* the certainty of faith by any other certainty, but even at *supporting* the certainty of faith by any other certainty, contradicts the nature of faith; every attempt of this kind amounts to substituting trust in flesh for trust in God. There cannot be any evidence in favor of revelation but the *fact* of revelation as known through faith. Yet this means that for those who do not have the experience of faith, there is *no shred of evidence* in favor of faith; the unbelieving man has *not the slightest reason* for doubting his unbelief; <sup>3</sup>revelation is nothing but a *factum brutum*; the unbeliever<sup>3</sup> can live in true happiness without paying the slightest attention to the claim of revelation: the unbeliever is excusable – contrary to what Paul clearly teaches. One cannot leave it then at the notion that there is no shred of evidence outside of the fact of revelation in favor of revelation. While a *direct* proof of revelation contradicts the nature of revelation, an *indirect* proof is inevitable. That indirect proof consists in the proof that the philosophic position is *inconsistent*, i.e. *absurd*. This proof that is not based on faith, does not do away with the difference between the knowledge of faith and merely human knowledge. For the alternative: "philosophy or obedience to revelation" is not complete: the third alternative is escapism or despair. The refutation of the claim of philosophy leads, not to faith, but to despair. The transformation of despondent man into a believing and comforted man is the action, not of man, but of God's grace.

1 verso

### 3. *What philosophy is, cannot be directly known to-day.*

It is more appropriate for me to try to explain what *philosophy* is. It seems to me that the idea of philosophy which is presupposed in present-day discussions by theologians as well as



by others, blurs the decisive features. As a consequence, the philosophic challenge to theology is underestimated. People are led to believe that all serious philosophers rejected atheism explicitly or implicitly and since all philosophic doctrines of God are obviously insufficient, the desirability, if not the fact, of revelation seems to become a foregone conclusion for every honest person. Of course, no one can help admitting that there is a philosophic atheism, but that atheism is declared to be a *modern* phenomenon, a *post-Christian* phenomenon which *therefore* presupposes Christianity and is an indirect witness to the Christian faith. Indeed a case can be made for the view that all specifically modern ideas are merely secularised versions of Biblical ideas and therefore untenable without Biblical support.

But the question is precisely whether there is no alternative to Biblical faith on the one hand, and *modern* unbelief on the other. Only if it is realized that there *is* such an alternative, will<sup>4</sup> the philosophic challenge to theology be properly appreciated. The alternative which I have in mind, is exactly philosophy in its original or pre-modern meaning.

To-day, we do not have a direct access to what philosophy originally meant. Our concept of philosophy is derived from *modern* philosophy, i.e. a *derivative* form of philosophy. Modern philosophy did not start from a reactivation of the original motivation of philosophy, but it took over the idea of philosophy as an *inheritance*. What is being done by a better type of historians of philosophy to-day, is nothing other than the attempt to make good for a sin of omission perpetrated by the founders of modern philosophy. These historians try to transform a mere inheritance into a living force. Hitherto, this historical work has had little effect on the general notion of philosophy which is still derived from modern philosophy. Accordingly, it is frequently assumed, e.g., that philosophy is essentially a *system*; it is forgotten that if this were so, philosophy as love of wisdom, or *quest* for wisdom, or quest for the truth, were superfluous. Philosophy was originally not systematic in *any* sense. The idea of system presupposes, as Hegel has seen, that the philosophizing individual finds "the abstract form," i.e. a context of *concepts*, "ready made." But philosophy in its original form consists in *ascending* to the

abstract form, or to conceptual clarity, or in *acquiring* concepts. Or, to turn to a more simple example, according to the view of philosophy which to-day is generally accepted, a distinction has to be made between philosophy and science. This distinction, wholly unknown to philosophy until the later part of the 18th century, amounts, for all practical purposes, to the admission of an unscientific philosophy and of an unphilosophic science. Of these two pursuits, science enjoys naturally the highest prestige. For who can have anything but contempt for an unscientific philosophy, a thing as unworthy of esteem as justice not backed by the will to *fight* for justice. This unphilosophic science does no longer aim at what philosophy originally aimed, viz. at *the final* account of the whole. Science conceives of itself as *progressive*, i.e. as being the outcome of a progress of human thought beyond all earlier human thought and as being capable of still further progress in the future. There is an appalling disproportion between the exactness of science and the self-consciousness of science as essentially progressive as long as science is not accompanied by the effort, at least *aspiring* to exactness, to prove the *fact* of progress, to understand the conditions of progress and thus to guarantee the possibility of still further progress in the future. I.e.: modern science is necessarily accompanied by the *history* of science or the history of human thought. That history now takes actually, if silently, the place formerly occupied by philosophy. If the history of human thought is studied in the spirit of science, one arrives at the conclusion that all human thought is historically conditioned or historically determined, or that the attempt to liberate one's mind from all prejudices or from all historical determination is fantastic. Once this has become a settled conviction constantly reinforced by an ever increasing number of new observations, a final account of the whole – an account which as such would be beyond historical determination – appears to be impossible *for reasons which can be made clear to every child*. Thereafter, and we are living in this Thereafter, there exists no longer a direct access to philosophy in its original meaning as quest for *the* true and final account of the whole. Once this state has been reached, the original meaning of philosophy, the very *idea* of philosophy, is accessible only through recollection

of what philosophy meant in the *past*, i.e. through *history* of philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. *The original meaning of philosophy.*

2 verso

What then is the original meaning of philosophy? Philosophy is originally the quest for truth, for *the* truth – for *the* beginnings of all things: In this, philosophy is at one with myth. But the philosopher is fundamentally different from the teller, or inventor, of myths. What separates the philosopher from the mythologist, is the discovery of φύσις: the first philosopher was the discoverer of φύσις. Φύσις had to be *discovered*: man does not know without further ado that there is such a thing as nature. Cf. O.T.<sup>1</sup> Nature was discovered when the quest for the beginnings became guided by these two fundamental distinctions:

a) the distinction between hearsay and seeing with one's own eyes – the beginnings of all things must be made manifest, or *demonstrated*, on the *basis* of what all men can see always in broad daylight or through *ascent* from the visible things.

b) the distinction between man-made things and things that are not man-made – the beginning of artificial things is man, but man is clearly not the first thing, *the* beginning of *all* things. Hence those things that are *not* man-made, lead more directly to the first things than do the artificial things. The production of artefacts is due to contrivance, to forethought. Nature was discovered when the possibility was realized that the first things may produce all other things, not by means of forethought, but by blind necessity. I say: the possibility. It was not excluded that the origin of all things is forethought, *divine* forethought. But this assertion required from now on a *demonstration*. The characteristic outcome of the

I [Noted in pencil at the bottom of the page with an asterisk:] Nature *not* totality of phenomena. The pre-philosophic equivalent of φύσις: custom or way; the permanent way = the right way; right = old, ancestral, one's own – right way necessarily implies account of ancestors – of first things; ancestors must be *gods*; variety of codes – *contradiction* –; *quest* for the right code by right account of first things – how to *proceed*: a) σκόπη – ὄψις (→ man is the measure of all things) – examination of all alleged superhuman knowledge in the light of *human* knowledge – *highest* superhuman knowledge is τέχνη; b) τέχνη – φύσις.

discovery of nature is the demand for rigorous demonstration of the existence of divine beings, for a demonstration which starts from the analysis of phenomena manifest to everyone. Since no demonstration can *presuppose* the demonstrandum<sup>5</sup>, philosophy is *radically* atheistic. The difference between Plato and a materialist like Democritus fades into insignificance if compared with the difference between<sup>1</sup> Plato and any doctrine based on religious experience. Plato's and Aristotle's attempts to demonstrate the existence of God far from proving the religious character of their teachings, actually disprove it. <sup>1</sup>

3 recto

This state of things is obscured by the *language* of Plato and of many other pre-modern philosophers. The *principle* underlying this particular kind of *speaking* has never been properly explained. Permit me therefore to say a few words about it.

Philosophy as the quest for the true beginnings of all things is the attempt to replace *opinions* about these beginnings by genuine *knowledge*, or *science*, of them. Now, it is by no means certain that this is a *legitimate* pursuit. Not only was there a popular prejudice against the attempt at prying<sup>6</sup> into the secrets of the gods, but strong reasons suggested the view that opinion, and not knowledge, is the very element of human or social or political life. If opinion is the element of political life, philosophy which questions opinions as such, dissolves the very element of social life: philosophy is essentially subversive (corrupting the young). From the point of view of philosophy, this is no objection to philosophy, since quest for the truth is infinitely more important than political life: philosophizing is learning to die. Still, the philosopher has to meet the legitimate claims of society or to shoulder his own responsibility as a citizen. He does this by refraining from publicly teaching what he considers *the* truth in so far as the truth could become dangerous to society. He hides his true teaching behind a socially useful exoteric teaching.

This view of the relation of philosophy to life, i.e. to society, presupposes that philosophy is essentially the preserve of the very few individuals who are by nature fit for philosophy. The radical distinction between the wise and the vulgar is essential to the original concept of philosophy. The idea that philosophy as such could become the element of human life



is wholly alien to all pre-modern thought. Plato demands that the philosophers should become kings; he does *not* demand that philosophy should become the ruler: in his perfect polity, only 2 or 3 individuals have any access whatever to philosophy; the large majority is guided by noble lies.<sup>II</sup> The<sup>7</sup> quest for knowledge implies that in all cases where sufficient evidence is lacking, assent must be withheld or judgment must be suspended. Now, it is impossible to withhold assent or to suspend judgment in matters of extreme urgency which require immediate decision: one cannot suspend judgment in matters of life and death. The philosophic enterprise that stands or falls by the possibility of suspense of judgment, requires therefore that all matters of life and death be settled *in advance*. All matters of life and death can be reduced to the question of how one ought to live. The philosophic enterprise presupposes that the question of how one ought to live be settled in advance. It is settled by the pre-philosophic proof of the thesis that the right way of life, the one thing needful, is the life devoted to philosophy and to nothing else. The pre-philosophic proof is later on confirmed, within philosophy, by an analysis of human nature. However this may be, according to its original meaning, philosophy is *the* right way of life, *the* happiness of man. All other human pursuits are accordingly considered fundamentally defective, or forms of human misery, however splendid. 'The moral life as moral life is *not* the philosophic life: for the philosopher, morality is nothing but the condition or the by-product of philosophizing, and not something valuable in itself. Philosophy is not only trans-social and trans-religious, but trans-moral as well.'<sup>1</sup> Philosophy asserts that man has ultimately no choice but that between philosophy and despair disguised by delusion: only through philosophy is man enabled to look reality in its stern face without losing his humanity. The claim of philosophy is no less radical than that raised on behalf of revelation.

Philosophy stands or falls by the possibility of suspense of judgment regarding the most fundamental questions. That is to say, philosophy is as such sceptical: in the original meaning

3 verso

II [Noted in pencil between the lines:] Idea of the enlightenment implied in current notion of philosophy: *harmony* between philosophy and society.



of the term. σκεψις means *looking at things, considering things*. Philosophy is concerned with understanding reality in all its complexity. Its complexity may preclude demonstrative answers to the fundamental questions: the arguments in favor of the various incompatible answers may be inconclusive. This would not make the philosophic enterprise futile: for the philosopher, full understanding of a *problem* is infinitely more important than any mere answer. What counts from the philosophic, i.e. the theoretical, point of view, is the articulation of the *subject matter* as an articulation supplied by the argument in favor of two contradictory answers rather than the answers themselves. Philosophy in its original sense is disputative rather than decisive. Disputation is possible only for people who are not concerned with decisions, who are not in a rush, for whom nothing is urgent except disputation. The anarchy of the systems, the *pudenda varietas philosophorum* is no objection whatever to philosophy.

When the philosophers say that the only possible happiness consists in philosophizing, they do not mean that philosophy can *guarantee* human happiness; for they know that man is not the master of his fate: εὐημερία, sunshine in the shape of food, shelter, health, freedom and friendship – a sunshine that is not *produced* by philosophy, is *required* for philosophizing and hence happiness, although it does not *constitute* happiness. In religious language: σὺν θεῷ = ἀγαθὴ τύχη. |

[ recto

**5. The *alternative to philosophy is revelation – philosophy must try to prove that revelation is impossible.*<sup>8</sup>**

The legitimacy of philosophy does not seem to be a serious problem for the philosopher as long as he is confronted only with the pagan myths and laws. For those myths and laws essentially antedate the awareness of the problem posed by the contradictions between the various divine laws, i.e. the problem whose realisation immediately precedes the emergence of philosophy. The situation of philosophy becomes fundamentally changed as soon as philosophy is confronted with the *Bible*. For the Bible claims to present a solution to the very problem which gave rise to philosophy, and the Biblical solution is diametrically opposed to the philosophic solution. The

Bible questions the view that philosophy is the only alternative to myth; according to the<sup>1</sup> Bible, the alternative to myth is the revelation of the living God. The Biblical account of the first things, especially the account of what happened in the period from the creation of heaven and earth to Abraham's acts of absolute obedience, can best be understood within the present context, as an attempt to explain why one particular possible code can be the only divine code that ever was and ever will be. The same account rejects as illegitimate the possibility which came to its maturity in Greek philosophy: the possibility that man can find his happiness, or his peace, by eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. What to the classical philosophers appeared as the perfection of man's nature, is described by the Bible as the product of man's disobedience to his Creator. When the classical philosophers conceive of man's desire to know as his highest natural desire, the Bible protests by asserting that this desire is a temptation. To the philosophic view that man's happiness consists in free investigation or insight, the Bible opposes the view that man's happiness consists in obedience to God. The Bible thus offers the only challenge to the claim of philosophy which can reasonably be made. One cannot seriously question the claim of philosophy in the name, e.g., of politics or of poetry. To say nothing of other considerations, man's ultimate aim is what is really good and not what merely *seems* to be good, and only through *knowledge* of the good is he enabled to find the good. But this is indeed the question: whether men can acquire the knowledge of the good, without which they cannot guide their lives individually and collectively, by the unaided efforts of their reason, or whether they are dependent for that knowledge on divine revelation. Only through the Bible is philosophy, or the quest for knowledge, challenged by *knowledge*, viz. by knowledge revealed by the omniscient God, or by knowledge identical with the self-communication of God. No alternative is more fundamental than the alternative: human guidance or divine guidance. *Tertium non datur*. The alternative between philosophy and revelation cannot be evaded by any harmonization or "synthesis." For each of the two antagonists proclaims something as the one thing needful, as the only thing that ultimately counts, and the one thing needful

proclaimed by the Bible is the opposite to that proclaimed by philosophy. In every attempt at harmonization, in every synthesis however impressive<sup>9</sup>, one of the two opposed elements is sacrificed, more or less subtly, but in any event surely, to the other: philosophy which means to be the queen, must be made the handmaid of revelation or *vice versa*. If it is confronted with the claim of revelation, and only if it is confronted with the claim of revelation, philosophy as a radically free pursuit becomes radically questionable. Confronted with the claim of revelation, the philosopher is therefore compelled to *refute* that claim. More than that: he must prove the *impossibility* of revelation. For if revelation is *possible*, it is possible that the philosophic enterprise is fundamentally wrong. <sup>1</sup>

ja recto

#### **6. Philosophy cannot refute revelation.**

You will not expect me to give a comprehensive and detailed appraisal of the philosophic critique of revelation. I shall set forth briefly the chief lessons to be learned from a critical examination of *Spinoza's* critique of revelation. I choose Spinoza because his is the most *elaborate* critique of revelation.

Spinoza rejects revelation because of its *imaginative* character. Since it is the imagination, and not the intellect, which is the vehicle of revelation, revelation cannot supply the truth. The Biblical facts to which Spinoza refers, doubtless prove that imagination *cooperates* in the act of revelation, but they do not disprove<sup>10</sup> the possibility that in that act imagination may be in the *service* of genuine superhuman illumination. He disposes of this possibility, in other words, he proves that divine revelation is nothing but human imagination by showing that the decisive features of revelation are identical with those of human imagination pure and simple. Imagination is essentially uncertain: we can never be certain as to whether what we imagine is actually taking place, or will take place, or not. Now, revelation is also uncertain as is shown by the fact that signs or miracles are required in order to establish the fact of revelation which without these signs and miracles would be absolutely uncertain. Secondly, imagination as such does not disclose the truth. Now, revelation as such does not disclose the truth. This is shown by the contradictions in the

Bible, i.e. by the contradictions of statements which are all allegedly based on revelation. Divine revelation is then nothing but human imagination. This is confirmed by the kinship between Biblical revelation and pagan divination. Traditional theology explains the difference between genuine revelation and pagan divination by tracing the former to God and the latter to demons or to the devil. Accordingly, belief in revelation would imply acceptance of belief in demons or in the devil. The whole fabric of the teaching based on revelation stands or falls by the acceptance of these and similar superstitious notions.

The deficiencies of this argument are obvious. It is based throughout on rigid and stupid limitation to that literal sense of every passage which is equally accessible to the believer and unbeliever. Spinoza does not consider the fundamental difference between carnal and spiritual understanding of the Bible. If his argument is to be of any significance, it must comprise a more radical consideration. Spinoza says that revelation requires confirmation by miracles; this again may be questioned. But he <sup>11</sup>is on safe ground when he asserts<sup>11</sup> that revelation in the Biblical sense is itself a miracle. His critique of miracles is the core of his critique of revelation.

A miracle is a supra-natural event. In order to be certain that a given event *is* supra-natural, and not e.g. a natural delusion of the imagination, one would have to know that it *cannot* be natural. I.e.: one would have to know the *limits* of the power of nature. This would require that we have a *complete* knowledge of nature, or that natural science is *completed*. This condition is not fulfilled and cannot be fulfilled. Accordingly, if we are confronted with an event that we cannot explain naturally, we can merely say that the event has not *yet* been explained, that it has not been explained *hitherto*. Miracles can never be *known* to be miracles.

4a verso

This argument is obviously defective. It presupposes that *everything* would be possible for nature, and Spinoza himself is forced to admit that there are things which are impossible by nature. The crucial example is resurrection from the dead. Spinoza disposes of the difficulty by raising this question: *how* do we know of these events which are impossible by nature? We know them, not from seeing with our own eyes, but from



*reports*. Who reported them? Trained scientific observers who looked at the facts in question dispassionately or people without any scientific training and attitude? Obviously people of the second type. Is it an accident that miracles do not happen in societies quickened by the spirit of science? The assertion of miracles is essentially relative to the pre-scientific stage of mankind. Divine revelation is human imagination as it can be active only in the pre-scientific stage. Divine revelation is identical with the prejudice of an ancient nation.

Spinoza derives further confirmation of his view from the results of his<sup>12</sup> criticism of the Bible. If Moses is not the author of the Pentateuch, the Mosaic miracles are reported, not only by untrained observers, but by people of a much later age who knew of the happenings in question only through the medium of oral tradition, i.e. of legends.

The whole argument tends to show that the belief in revelation essentially belongs to a pre-scientific, or mythical, mind. No one can deny that there is an element of truth in Spinoza's assertion. But this element of truth is inconclusive. For we are justified in retorting that man is more capable of dimly *divining* the truth of revelation before he has cut<sup>13</sup> himself loose from the roots of his existence by limiting himself to the scientific approach than after that. That the pre-scientific horizon is more favorable to belief in revelation than is the scientific horizon, does not yet prove that revelation is absolutely bound up with a mythical horizon.

Spinoza's reasoning remains defective as long as it is not supplemented by an account of the *motivation* of the alleged revelation in terms of the unbelieving reason. For Spinoza, belief in revelation is one form of *superstition*. Superstition is the way of acting and thinking in which man's pre-philosophic life protects itself against its breakdown in despair. The pre-philosophic life is the life swayed by the imagination and the emotions; in that life, man attaches himself with all his heart to finite and perishable things; their actual or foreseen loss drives him to despair of his own power to secure his happiness; he is unable to look reality in its face, to recognize with equanimity the utter insignificance of his fate and of his more cherished objects; he craves comfort; he demands passionately that his fate be of cosmic significance, and his unchecked imagination



obeys the demands of his desires by producing the required images.

For the time being, we limit ourselves to noting that Spinoza completely disregards what the Bible and theology teach regarding the specifically religious sentiments. When speaking of the crucial importance of fear e.g., he does not say a word about the difference between servile fear and filial fear. He seems to discredit himself completely by saying that he does not understand the Bible.

The best one could say about his kind of argument is that it drives home how unevident or uncertain revelation is without previous *faith* in revelation. But since this is admitted by theology, an extensive<sup>1</sup> argument which suffices for protecting unbelief against the demands of revelation seems to be almost insipid. In other words, even if the unbeliever could explain satisfactorily how belief in revelation *could* develop as a delusion, he would not have proved that revelation is *impossible*. Indeed, all philosophic questioning of the *demonstrability* of revelation becomes relevant only if it transforms itself into a demonstration of the *impossibility* of revelation, or of miracles.

To prove that revelation or miracles are impossible, means to prove that they are incompatible with the nature of God as the most perfect being. All proofs of this kind presuppose that there is a natural theology. Hence to-day, when the possibility of natural theology is generally denied, a refutation of the belief in revelation is not even imaginable. On the other hand, however, a *hypothetical* natural theology, a theology arguing for the mere *notion* of a most perfect being, would suffice. For it is hard to deny for anyone that, if there is a God, he must be absolutely perfect. The purely philosophic doctrine of God, i.e. the only theology which is unequivocally *natural* theology, was based on the analogy of the wise man: the most perfect being as known from experience, the wise man, gives us the only clue regarding the most perfect being simply. E.g., a wise man would pity the fools rather than wax indignant about their criminal or monstrous actions; he would be kind to everyone, he would not care particularly for anyone except for his friends, i.e. those who are actually or potentially wise. Accordingly, God cannot be conceived to condemn men<sup>1</sup> to

5 verso

eternal damnation. He cannot even be conceived as exercising individual providence. He cannot be conceived as *loving* men, i.e. beings who are infinitely inferior to him in wisdom. 'But at this point a most serious difficulty arises for natural theology.' A God<sup>14</sup> who is infinitely superior to man in wisdom, may be said to be *inscrutable*: He is *mysterious*. All the difficulties against which natural theology seemed to protect men, come in again: a mysterious God may well be the God of revelation. There is therefore only one way of disposing of the possibility of revelation or miracles: one must prove that God is in no way mysterious, or that we have adequate knowledge of the essence of God. This step was taken by Spinoza. His whole argument stands or falls by his denial of the legitimacy of any analogical knowledge of God: any knowledge of God that we can have, must be as clear and as distinct as that which we can have of the triangle e.g.

The question is how he secured this fundamental dogma. The usual answer is that he bases his doctrine on an intuitive knowledge of the idea of God. But it can be shown that Spinoza's intuitive knowledge is, not the beginning, but the end of his philosophy, or, in other words, that Spinoza's intuitive knowledge is knowledge, not of God, but of nature as *distinguished* from God. Spinoza arrives at his doctrine of God by freely forming a clear, distinct idea of God as<sup>15</sup> the fully intelligible cause of all things: his methodical demand for clear, distinct knowledge, and no proof of any kind, disposes of the mysteriousness of God. What one might *call* a proof is supplied by the fact that the clear and distinct idea of God leads to a clear and distinct idea of all things or of the whole, whereas every other idea of God leads to a confused account, e.g. to the account given in the Bible. We may say that Spinoza's theology is a purely hypothetical doctrine which could become more than a hypothesis only if it actually led to a clear and distinct account of the whole. But it can never lead to that result: it can't lead to an account of the *whole* because it arbitrarily excludes those *aspects* of the whole which can't be understood clearly, distinctly.

The limitations of Spinoza's teaching are of general significance for the following reason: that teaching presents the most comprehensive, or the most ambitious, program of what

*modern science* could possibly be. To realize that Spinoza has failed to refute revelation means therefore to realize that modern science cannot have refuted revelation. Modern science is much more modest in its claims than Spinoza's philosophy, because it has divorced itself from natural theology; hence no objection whatever to the teaching of revelation can be based on modern science. To mention only one example: it is sometimes asserted that the Biblical account of the creation of the world has been refuted by modern geology, paleontology etc. But: all scientific accounts *presuppose* the impossibility of miracles; presupposing this, they prove that the age of the earth, or of life on the earth etc. is millions of years; but what natural processes could achieve only in such periods, could be done in a moment by God miraculously.

6 recto

To conclude: philosophy may succeed in proving the impossibility of demonstrating the fact of revelation to unbelievers; it may thus succeed in defending the unbelieving position; but this is absolutely irrelevant seeing that revelation is *meant* to be accessible only to faith, or on the *basis* of faith. The *experiential* knowledge of the *fact* of revelation remains absolutely unshaken.

**7. *The impression of a refutation of revelation by philosophy is created by the influence of philosophic critique on modern theology: this seems to show that the radical position of revelation is possible only in mythical horizons.***

We could leave it at that but for the fact that modern theology has abandoned many positions of traditional theology under the influence of the philosophic and scientific attack on revelation. This fact seems to show that the belief in revelation is not as unassailable as it would appear on the basis of the general consideration that I have sketched. The modern theologians claim of course that by abandoning certain traditional positions they bring out the pure and central meaning of revelation more clearly than traditional theology has done. They claim that what they have abandoned are merely peripheral elements of theology and that they limit themselves to the central or essential theological teaching. But the question arises whether this distinction is tenable, i.e. whether the peripheral

elements are not necessary consequences, or implications, of the central thesis – and therefore whether modern theology which abandons the peripheral teaching, is consistent. The apparent inconsistency of modern theology has led Nietzsche among others to hurl against modern theology the charge that it lacks intellectual honesty.

Many present-day theologians subscribe without hesitation to Spinoza's thesis that the Bible is not everywhere truthful and divine. They reject therefore the belief in the verbal inspiration of the Bible and in the historical authenticity of the Biblical records. They reject especially the belief in miracles. They admit that the Bible abounds with mythical notions. They would say that in revealing himself to earlier generations God allowed them to understand this revelation within their mythical horizon because that horizon does not prevent at all the faithful or pious understanding of revelation. The change from the mythical world-view of the past to the scientific world-view of the modern age is completely indifferent as regards the intention of revelation. But since the mythical outlook has become discredited, one does the greatest disservice to faith by keeping the message of revelation within the mythical shell in which the record of early revelation has been transmitted to us.<sup>16</sup>

6 verso

Modern theology stands or falls by the distinction between the central or true and peripheral or mythical elements of the Bible. The Biblical basis, or point d'appui, for this distinction is the distinction between the spiritual and the carnal, or between God and flesh. Blessed is the man who puts his trust in God, cursed is the man who<sup>1</sup> puts his trust in flesh. Revelation is revelation of God Himself as the Father, Judge and Redeemer – and nothing else. The response to revelation is faith in God Himself – and in nothing else. But man is always tempted to put his trust, not in God, but in flesh. He substitutes worship of his own works, or idols, for the worship of God. He substitutes faith in something tangible, in something which he can control by his sense-perception, reason or action, for pure faith which has no support outside of the direct self-communication of God. Hence he tries to secure belief in God by belief in facts such as traditions or books or miracles. This has happened in traditional theology and this



has been corrected radically in modern theology. The true understanding of faith demands that a radical distinction be made between theology which is nothing but soteriology and true knowledge simply which is nothing but knowledge of the world, or cosmology. Natural theology, which is neither soteriology nor cosmology, must be rejected. The idea that the Bible contains anything relevant to faith that can be contradicted or confirmed by science, must be dismissed as absurd. Faith does not presuppose any definite view of the world as preferable to any other. It does not require any knowledge of facts which are not an integral part of the experiential-existential knowledge of God as the Redeemer. Revelation and faith "are," i.e. they are meaningful, only in and for decision, whereas facts as facts are independent of any decision. The very *manner of being* of revelation and faith is therefore fundamentally different from the manner of being of any fact, or of the world as world. There cannot be any conflict between revelation and knowledge of facts because revelation does not say anything about facts except that they are worldly or fleshly. All knowledge that is equally accessible to the believer and unbeliever, is absolutely irrelevant to the assertions of faith, and therefore science<sup>17</sup> is perfectly free: the notion that philosophy or science ought<sup>18</sup> [to] be the handmaid of theology, is based on a radical misunderstanding.

It seems to me that this kind of theology identifies the genuinely Biblical distinction between the spirit and the flesh with apparently similar, but actually entirely different distinctions that originate in modern philosophy: the distinction between mind and nature, between history and nature, between the existential and the merely real (i.e. between the being of responsible and responsive beings and the being of facts or things or affairs). Using the distinction between history and nature, a modern theologian has said that faith in revelation requires the truth of certain *historical* facts and that therefore a conflict between historical criticism and Biblical faith is at least possible, whereas faith in revelation implies no assertion regarding *nature*, and therefore no conflict between science and Biblical faith is possible.

7 recto

The solution suggested by many present-day theologians is apt to lead to the consequence that the assertions of faith



have a purely *inner* meaning, that the truth ascribed to them is a purely emotional and moral truth, and not truth simply. There exists therefore the danger that only the intrinsic *value* of the experience of faith distinguishes that experience from any hallucination or delusion. However this may be, the legitimate distinction between the spirit and the flesh, or between God and the world, does not justify the distinction between the central and the peripheral – at least as that distinction is frequently practised to-day. What I am driving at is this: while faith is not *of* the world, it necessarily issues, not merely in actions *in* the world, but in assertions *about* the world. Faith implies the assertion that the world is *created*. In consequence of the distinction between God and the world, Gogarten has tried to limit<sup>19</sup> the thesis of creation to the creation of *man*; <sup>20</sup>the thesis of<sup>20</sup> creation does not say anything about extra-human beings. This is an obvious absurdity. He also has asserted that God speaks to man only through other men, especially through the preaching of the Gospel. But certainly the OT prophecies contain many cases in which God spoke to human beings directly. Bultmann has denied that the resurrection, as distinguished from the crucifixion, can be understood as a phenomenon in the world, as an event which took place at a given moment in the past. He does not deny of course that the crucifixion was a phenomenon in the world. Considering the connection between crucifixion and resurrection, Bultmann's distinction is unconvincing and is obviously due to his unwillingness to assert an unambiguous miracle. The fact that the cross is visible to everyone, whereas resurrection is only to the eyes of faith, does not do away with the fact that to the eyes of faith resurrection is visible also as an event in the past, and not merely as belonging to the eschatological Now.

There cannot be faith in God that is not faith in<sup>21</sup> our being *absolutely* in the hands of God, and this means that is not faith in God's *omnipotence*, and therefore in the possibility of *miracles*. It is true that miracles cannot be the *basis* of genuine faith; but it is quite another thing to say that genuine faith does not *issue* in belief in miracles, or that it is incompatible with belief in miracles. But if the admission of the possibility of miracles is of the essence of faith, there is no reason whatever for making

an arbitrary distinction between [what] one is tempted to call intelligible miracles (especially the resurrection) and unintelligible miracles (the sun stands still in the vale of Ajalon). If we are truly convinced of our utter insufficiency and of God's hiddenness, we will prefer humbly to confess that a given Biblical account does not touch us, or does not edify us, rather than to say that the account in question can be rejected as untrue, or as a mythical residue.

7 verso

But modern theology becomes inconsistent not only by making an arbitrary distinction between the miracles which it admits, and those which it rejects; it also obscures the meaning of miracles as such. According to the traditional view, miracles are supranatural actions of God, or actions that interfere with, or interrupt, the natural order. Brunner<sup>III</sup> e.g. rejects this view. He explains the miracles by employing the analogy of how life uses inanimate matter: the life processes do not interfere with the processes of inanimate matter, or put them out of action, but use them for a purpose alien to inanimate matter. Analogously, revelation "does not break into the sphere of human existence in such a way that it either pushes the human element aside or puts it out of action; but it enters by using the human in its service. Jesus Christ is a human being, 'born of a woman' etc. He is 'true man', as the dogma says." (303)<sup>1</sup> In Christ, the divine and the human interpenetrate: the human is not removed. (304)<sup>1</sup> Statements such as these seem to evade the real issue. Jesus is born, not simply of a woman, but of a virgin; above all, he is not begotten by a human father. If this is not an interruption of the natural order, I do not know what it is. If man is essentially, as Aristotle asserts, generated by man, Jesus as the Christ could not be a true man. The dogma stands or falls therefore by the fact that a being can be a human being without being begotten by human parents. The Scriptural proof of this possibility is

III [Emil Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft. Die Lehre von der christlichen Glaubenserkenntnis* (Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1941). In the following, Strauss cites Olive Wyon's translation *Revelation and Reason: The Christian Doctrine of Faith and Knowledge* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946). The passages that Strauss cites or to which he refers are found in the original German edition on pp. 256, 276, 277, 280, 299, 300, 323, 329, 419, 420.]

Adam. And the parallel between Adam and Christ is basic for Christian theology also in other respects.

I would like to dwell for a moment on the theology of Brunner because Brunner is <sup>22</sup>unusually conservative and sober.<sup>22</sup> To mention only one example: Brunner rejects Kierkegaard's thesis according to which the Christian faith requires not more than the Apostolic reports that they believed that in that and that year God showed himself in the form of a servant, that he lived, taught and died. Brunner soberly admits that "the credibility of the Gospel narrative in its main features is the necessary foundation of real Christian faith." Yet even Brunner abandons<sup>23</sup> essential theological positions. His principle is that "the Scriptures are the word of God, because, and in so far as, they give us Christ," i.e. that the essential teaching of the Bible is soteriological, not cosmological, and<sup>24</sup> he rejects therefore without any misgivings all cosmological theses of the Bible. He admits that the Christian faith "does contain certain historical statements." But he obviously thinks that no historical assertions, essential to faith, have cosmological implications. While insisting most strongly on the historicity of the life of Jesus and of the resurrection, he rejects the historicity of Adam and of the whole Biblical account of the origins of mankind. But does not<sup>1</sup> the Biblical eschatology stand in strict correspondence to Biblical *poetology*, or account of the beginnings? Just as the eschatology of unbelief (the notion that human life will one day perish from the earth without leaving any traces and without Last Judgment) corresponds to the poetology of unbelief (the evolutionism of modern science). If one accepts evolution, does one not admit that man was not created perfect? are then man's greatest failings not due to the imperfect form in which human beings made their first appearance on earth? is man then not excusable – contrary to Paul's assertion: how could early man *know* God's law if he was not created perfect and dwelling in Eden, but poorly equipped mentally and materially? are his polytheism, his idolatry, his moral monstrosities not necessary errors as distinguished from *sin*? But, one might object, regardless of when<sup>25</sup> primitive man *became* a real human being: *in that moment* he had the choice between obedience and sin: *in that moment*, however frequently repeated, the fall took place and

is taking place. But what shall we say<sup>26</sup> of the *inheritance* of *excusable ignorance* with which real man starts his career, if the evolutionary account is right – i.e. if man was not really created, but “cast on this globe” and owes all his humanity to his revolutionary efforts? I fail to see how one can avoid the dilemma: either a perfect beginning followed by sin, or an imperfect beginning and hence *no* original sin. By denying the historicity of the fall, Brunner repeats the typical mistake for which he upbraids so severely the idealistic theologians in regard to incarnation and resurrection: he replaces a unique fact by an external concept or symbol.

Observations of this kind may be fatal to modern theology; they are ultimately of no consequence whatever. The inconsistency of modern theology does not improve in the least the position of philosophy. For even if the philosopher would have succeeded in tearing to pieces every *theology*, he would not have advanced a single step in his attempt to refute *revelation*. |

#### 8. *Revelation cannot refute philosophy.*

8 verso

Let us now look at the other side of the picture. Let us see how philosophy fares if it is attacked by the adherent of revelation. I have said that the theologian is compelled to refute philosophy. For if he fails to do that, the philosopher can say that there is no shred of evidence against the view that the right way of life is the philosophic life: revelation is nothing but a *factum brutum*, and in addition an uncertain one. Our<sup>27</sup> first impression is that all theological arguments directed against philosophy are defective, because they are circular: they are conclusive only on the *basis* of faith.

Take Pascal's famous argument of the misery of man without God, i.e. without the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, an argument which is meant to be conclusive “*par nature*.” This argument does not in any way refute Plato's thesis that the philosopher, as exemplified by Socrates in particular, lives on the islands of the blessed. If Pascal would say that Plato did not have Pascal's Christian experience, Plato could answer with equal right that Pascal obviously did not have Plato's experience of philosophic serenity. Pascal might answer that all



philosophers underrate the power of evil, that they are superficial or optimistic. He might refer to the manner in which Lucretius opens his poem devoted to the exposition of Epicurean philosophy by praising the beneficent power of earthly love. But Lucretius could answer that this edifying prayer is only the beginning: the poem ends with the description of a most terrible plague: philosophic equanimity is beyond the conflict between optimism and pessimism.

Yet, the theologian would continue, evil is not primarily physical evil, but *moral* evil. The philosophers are blind to the fact, and the power, of *sin*. "Philosophic ethics . . . knows less of (moral) evil than the man in the street" (Brunner 327). But for this blindness, the philosophers could never have elaborated, and used, their natural theology which is based on the analogy of the wise man. The philosopher who<sup>1</sup> complacently asserts that God could not visit men with eternal punishment, because he, the philosopher, would never take sins of less wise beings as seriously, merely shows by this argument his callousness, or at best he reveals his dim notion that he would be lost, if God were to take sins seriously.

9 recto

To this the philosopher would answer by questioning the decisive and ultimate significance of *moral* criteria. All theological attacks on the laxity of all philosophic morality could<sup>28</sup> be rebutted by the demand for a demonstration that *the* cosmic principle, or *the* first cause, is in any way concerned with morality. | No evidence supporting this view has ever been advanced: The man in the street is no authority: for is not theology the ultimate source of what he thinks and even feels? In other words, the philosopher would say that sin presupposes a moral *law*, and he would deny that there *is* a moral law. He would deny what Luther e.g. considered an indubitable fact, viz. that every human being experiences something of the reality of God who confronts him in the conscience which judges him according to the moral law. He would refer to what Aristotle says on αἰδώς (sense of shame): that it befits only young people, mature people simply must not do anything of which they would be ashamed. And as regards the intentions (≠ actions), the βουλευσεις are ἄδελφοι. There is no "synderesis" in Aristotle. <sup>1</sup> The open secret of the Philebus: the highest good: θεωρία plus ἡδονή.<sup>1</sup>



*The theologian:* but it is inconsistent of the philosopher not to admit the strictest moral demands; for philosophy claims to be love of *truth*, and every relaxation of morality amounts to admitting the right of self-assertion or self-seeking or eudemonism which is incompatible with the radical self-denial that is implied in every real quest for truth. Philosophy is inconsistent because it would *require* a rebirth, a regeneration, but excludes it.

*The philosopher:* denies that human self-assertion and love of truth are incompatible. For we have a *selfish need* for truth. We *need* the eternal, the *true* eternal (Plato's doctrine of  $\xi\rho\omega\varsigma$ ). The kinship between φιλοσοφία and φιλοτιμία: *lasting* fame possible only through knowledge of the *truth*. The most farsighted selfishness transforms itself into, nay, reveals itself as, perfect unselfishness.

*The theologian:* philosophy is self-deification; philosophy has its root in *pride*.

*The philosopher:* if we understand by God the most perfect being that is a *person*, there are no gods but the philosophers (Sophist<sup>29</sup> in princ: θεος τις ἐλεγκτικός). Poor gods? Indeed, measured by imaginary standards. – As to “pride,” who is more proud, he who says that *his* personal fate is of concern to *the* cause of the universe, or he who humbly admits that his fate is of no concern whatever to anyone but to himself and his few friends.

*The theologian:* the philosophic understanding of man is *superficial*; they have not fathomed the depths of man, his despair, what is hidden in his craving for distraction and in that mood of boredom which reveals more<sup>30</sup> of man's reality than all his rational activities.

g verso

*The philosopher:* these and similar phenomena reveal indeed the problematic character of all ordinary human pursuits of happiness which are not the pursuit of the happiness of contemplation. The philosopher as philosopher never craves distraction (although he needs relaxation from time to time), and he is never bored. Theological psychology is such a psychology of *non-philosophic man*, of the *vulgar*, as is not guided by the understanding of the natural aim of man which is contemplation. If the philosophers do not stress certain most “interesting” aspects of men, they are guided by a most noble

pedagogic intention: it is better for men to be reminded of what is noble and reasonable in them than to be depressed by moving and effeminating pictures of the seamy side of life.

***Philosophy cannot explain*<sup>31</sup> *revelation* – ?**

Perhaps the most impressive theological argument is taken from the insufficiency of the philosophic *explanation* of the belief in revelation. Philosophy *must* interpret revelation as a *myth*. I.e. it must overlook the essential *difference* between myth and revelation.

<i>Myth</i>		<i>Revelation</i>
Polytheism	–	One omnipotent God
Gods controlled by impersonal fate	–	the <i>actions</i> of God
recurrent phenomena	–	absolutely unique, unrepeatable events – <i>decision</i> , History
no distinct relation to historical events	–	essential relation to historical events (OT history; “Crucified under Pontius Pilatus”)

Brunner 259: “In *all* forms of religion, in addition to fear, there is reverence; as well as the human desire for happiness, there is also a real longing for divine perfection; in addition to social usefulness, there is also a genuine striving after communion with the deity, and a genuine submission to a higher, holy command; and behind all that rank fantasy growth[s] of affective thought there is an element which cannot be derived from fantasy at all: the knowledge of something which is unconditioned, ultimate, normative, supra-mundane, supra-temporal.”<sup>1</sup>

10 recto

Reasons why philosophic explanation *seems* to be insufficient:

- a) the philosopher’s unwillingness *openly* to identify the very core of the Biblical teaching with superstition – hence no real *open* discussion of the *difference* between Bible and other superstition (myth).

b) Tr. IX. 42 bg., 60 end<sup>IV</sup>: the extremely rare psychological phenomena as alien as possible to the typical experiences of the philosopher – hence imperfect description of the phenomena by the philosopher.

Now as regards the philosophic interpretation – the philosopher would admit the essential difference between Bible and myth: the Bible presupposes, just as philosophy itself, the realization of the *problem* of myth<sup>V</sup>: myth – philosophy / myth – revelation.

Myth and revelation belong together: not predominance of the critical-sceptical spirit.

Myth and philosophy belong together: not predominance of morality.

The starting-point of philosophic explanation<sup>32</sup> of *revelation* would therefore be the fact that the foundation of belief in revelation is the belief in the central importance of *moral-ity*.

(Brunner 424<sup>33</sup>: according to the NT, “this despairing knowledge of distress and need, that is, the awareness of sin,” comes from the law which only makes demands. The law in question “*belongs absolutely to that which man can tell himself*” – i.e. it is meant to be accessible to man as man.

333: “it is a fact to which the Scripture[s] and the best teachers of the Church bear witness with one voice: that *man as man knows the law of God*. . . indeed that this knowledge of the law is the *center of [the] natural human existence* and the natural self-understanding of man.”)

The task of the philosopher is to understand how the original (mythical) idea of the θεῖος νόμος is modified by the radical understanding of the moral implication and thus transformed into the idea of revelation.

IV [Benedictus Spinoza: *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, IX, ed. Bruder § 42 beginning, § 60 end: “Nescio quid superstitio suadere potuit, et forte inde factum est, quia utramque lectionem aeque bonam seu tolerabilem aestimabant, ideoque, ne earum aliqua negligetur, unam scribendam et aliam legendam voluerunt.” “. . . neque enim scire teneor, quae religio ipsos moverit, ut id non facerent.”]

V σημείον: the “historical” character of large parts of the Bible – cf. the insistence of *truth* in Greek ἱστορίη ≠ myths, poetry.

- 1) Need of man → society, or else sociability was irreducible: need for *law*.
- 2) [need] for *good* law: original criterion for goodness: ancestral.

Rational basis: a) tested things, b) concern with stability.

- 3) the law depends on the ancestors = the *father* or fathers, *the* source of one's being, loving (beneficent) and demanding obedience (cf. Fustel de Coulanges).

- 4) absolute superiority of the ancestors: superhuman<sup>31</sup> beings, *divine* beings – *divine law*: the first things, | the sources of our being are *gods*.

10 verso

- 5) contradiction between various divine laws: only *one* divine law.

- 6) *full* obedience to the law: the law must be the source of *all* blessings → the god must be *omnipotent* → there can be only *one* God – Maker, Creator ≠ Generator.

- 7) *full* obedience to the law: obedience not merely a duty to be fulfilled in order to get something *else* as reward: full obedience is *love* of the one God with all one's heart, all one's soul and all one's power.

- 8) *full* obedience to the law: no human relation is left to irresponsible arbitrariness → love of *all* men. God is the father of all men, and all men are brothers. בצלם אלהים [in the image of God – Gen. 1,27].

- 9) *full* obedience to the law: not only external actions, but the right *intention*: purity of the heart (loving God with *all* one's heart) – impossibility for man of achieving this: *sin*: need for *mercy*: the loving God forgiving sin more important than God as Judge.

- 10) full obedience to the law: rejection of ὑβρις, self-assertion in *any* sense: critique of cities, arts, kings – *especially* of science which is *the* vehicle of human self-assertion. A unique final revelation which has taken place in the past is *the* correlative of absolute obedience, absolute surrender.

No science: no universals – goodness a derivative from a *particular, individual* phenomenon (goodness = being Christian, Jew . . .). *The* guidance is not knowledge of universals, but the record of the deeds of the mysterious God.

- 11) full obedience to the law: the *required* law must be the *gift* of God: *God* must purify our heart, if our heart is to be pure – *God* must open our lips if our mouth is to proclaim His praise. God must communicate *Himself* to man → He must come *close* to him: Incarnation.<sup>VI</sup> |

### Objections:

11 recto

a) The problem of the presence, the call – not characteristic of the *Bible*. The presence of Asclepius e.g. – what was it? Hallucination – Cf. also C. F. [Meyer],<sup>VII</sup> Heidegger: God is death.

b) the explanation cannot account for the *fact* of real love of God and neighbour – but it is a *question* whether these are *facts*, and not *interpretations* of facts – what has to be explained, is merely the *demand* for such love.

c) the explanation is based on the Bible of theologians – it *utilizes* them → it *presupposes* them: if the explanation were valid, philosophers should have been able to devise the whole claim independently of the Bible, – i.e., for all practical purposes, in classical antiquity. But: why should philosophers who were going to the opposite direction as the Biblical teachers have been *capable* of discovering what only an entirely different human type bent on the anti-philosophic possibility *could* discover or invent?

VI [Strauss grouped points 5 and 6 with a brace. He either wanted to stress thereby that they belong together or he intended to reduce the eleven steps of his genealogy to ten.]

VII [The reference in the Ms. "Cf. also C. F., Heidegger: God is death," which is rendered obscure by an obvious omission, is to a parallel between Conrad Ferdinand Meyer's novella *Die Versuchung des Pescara* and the significance that Heidegger accords death: In chapters 3 and 4 of the novella, Pescara calls death his divinity. In this connection, consider Leo Strauss, "Preface to Spinoza's Critique of Religion" (1965) in *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), n. 23.]



## Notes on Philosophy and Revelation

### N 1 recto *The Biblical argument.*

1) *Two* considerations guiding Biblical account of creation: God giving *names* to things, and his *seeing* that things created by him are *good*. In the light of these considerations → depreciation of heaven and heavenly bodies → Bible opposes the admiring contemplation of heaven – Babylon seat of astronomy: *tower of Babel* – philosophy.

2) Only things not explicitly called good in Genesis 1 are: heaven and *man*. Connection between problematic goodness of heaven and of man: heaven *tempts* man. Why and how? Question answered by Gen. 2, 3 (story of the fall).

3) Prohibition against eating of “knowledge” = depreciation of heaven → rejection of philosophy

Man created to live in child-like *obedience*, in *blind* obedience: *without* knowledge of good and evil. To devote himself to the *earth*, to his *life* on earth ( $\neq$  heaven): man *names*, *rules* only earthly things. Knowledge of good, evil = knowledge *simply* (God’s knowledge of the completed work = knowledge of its being *good*). Eating of “knowledge” = irreconcilable with eating of “life”: not naturally, but because God has *willed* it so. For *this* reason, man has to be *forcibly* prevented from eating of “life” after eating of “knowledge” (expulsion from garden).

4) *How* did man fall? Account of fall explains under what conditions could there be human knowledge of good and evil, and why that condition is impossible of fulfillment.

Eve, not Adam, tempted at once (she adds “touching” to “eating” – more stringent than God). But decisive: intervention of *serpent*.

Serpent says the *truth* – allegedly it contradicts God's word: you will *not* die . . . Why is the serpent right? By virtue of *reasoning*: for God knows that on the *day* you eat thereof you will be like Gods . . . God *cannot* kill you, because he *knows* – his *knowledge* limits his power – his knowledge of something *independent* of his will → μοῖρα (Deum fato subicere), ideas, ἀνάγκη, φυσίς.

The fact that serpent is *right*<sup>35</sup> shows that there is something to it – but the sequel (the expulsion) shows that the serpent is *decisively* wrong: something<sup>36</sup> *unexpected* happens. |

True statement of serpent is *decisively* wrong, because the *reason* on which it is based, is wrong: limitation of God's power is proved by the limited character of *manifestations* of God's power. Serpent is blind to the *hidden, reserved* power of God. Serpentine principle is: denial of divine omnipotence.

N 1 verso

5) That *this* is decisive point, is shown by *punishment* of serpent. Although unexpected: <sup>1</sup>serpent was created *good* – its *slyness* is good,<sup>1</sup> serpent was not *forbidden* to tempt Eve – its punishment a clear case of poena, crimen sine lege – serpent tacitly identifies God's law with his *promulgated* law – and it is *punished* for it. Just as God's *works* do not reveal God's full<sup>1</sup> power, his<sup>37</sup> revealed word does not reveal his full *will*.

Connection with Genesis 1: The serpentine conclusion from the *regularity* of heavenly movements etc. to their *intrinsic necessities*.

6) Ascription of the attitude which fully developed is that of philosophy or science, to the *serpent*.

*Brutish*: man's dignity or nobility consists, not in his knowledge-begotten freedom, but in the simplicity of his obedience. <sup>1</sup>Also: *woman*.<sup>1</sup> This is not to deny that it is a *real* serpent.

7) Self-assurance of serpent based on blindness to God's unpromulgated law. On the other hand, radical obedience → *divination* of God's unpromulgated law. Abraham's bargains with God for the salvation of <sup>38</sup>the few just<sup>38</sup> in the condemned cities. (Contrast with Cain – guardian of his brother – and Noa[h]'s indifference to victims of deluge). – Abraham's action is a *climax*. <sup>1</sup>More important than עקדה [the binding of Isaac – Gen. 22,9] which is maximum obedience to *revealed* law.<sup>1</sup>

8) Story of fall, especially punishment of serpent → man cannot know what God will do – *This* is the meaning of “I shall be that I shall be” (= I shall be gracious to whom I shall be gracious). *Hidden* God – “the Lord hath said that he would dwell in the<sup>39</sup> thick darkness.” Man cannot know what God *is* (he cannot *see* God): if he could know what God is, he would know what God *will be*. God will be all he will be, and not what he *is*, i.e. *known* to be, *now*. What man can know of God, he owes to God – to his free revelation – freedom or *grace* → particular revelation, ‘contingent’ revelation (≠ eternal revelation)<sup>1</sup> → *particular* law is the divine law, the absolute law.

9) Story of fall not last word of Bible about knowledge. General principle of Bible: things rebelliously devised by man, are finally accepted by God, ‘transformed into vehicles of grace’ (city, agriculture, arts, kingship . . .). The same applies to *knowledge*. God *gives* knowledge: his law, becomes<sup>10</sup> the tree of knowledge which is the tree of life for all those who cling to it. After the fall, man can no longer live in uninstructed obedience. He needs now wisdom, understanding: but not philosophy, but divine revelation. |

N 2 recto

10) *Final conclusion*: Bible grants to philosophers that they would be right if there were no God who can and does reveal himself. Only philosophy, not art, morality etc. etc., is the alternative to revelation: human guidance or divine guidance. *Tertium non datur*. If God had not forbidden it, eating of tree of knowledge = ὁμοιωσις θεῷ would be the highest human possibility. Myth of *Politikos*: if there is no divine guidance, *human* guidance is the one thing needful. Philosophy and Bible agree as to this: the alternatives are<sup>1</sup> philosophy or divine revelation.

### ***Philosopher’s answer to Biblical argument.***

Philosophers would not be impressed by it: reminded of pagan stories of envious gods – since God would not be envious, he would not forbid man to become like him by understanding good and evil.

Biblical<sup>41</sup> insistence on man’s *faith*, on *trust*, in God would be ridiculed as implying a gentleman’s view of the first cause: every gentleman is offended if one does not believe him or his word (Cyrop. VII 2, 15–17) – a<sup>42</sup> wise being<sup>43</sup> would not be

offended by doubt, but would *encourage* doubt of everything not evident.

Above all: νόμος and μῦθος. Bible<sup>1</sup> in some respects better, in some worse than other νομοι and μῦθοι.

**The inevitable alternative: philosophy or revelation.**

1) Alternative cannot be avoided by ascribing to philosophy and revelation different spheres or planes – for: they make assertions about the *same* subject: about the world and human life. (Cf. the controversies about Darwinism, biblical criticism etc.: conflict is, not only possible, but actual.)

2) Alternative not contradicted by fact of harmonizations which abound throughout Western history. For: <sup>1</sup>fact is *attempt* at harmonization, not harmonization *itself*.<sup>1</sup> In every harmonization one is sacrificed, subtly, but surely, to the other.

<sup>1</sup>Philosopher accepts revelation.<sup>1</sup> If there is revelation, faith is infinitely more important than philosophy – philosophy ceases to be *the* way of life – by accepting revelation, the philosopher ceases to be a philosopher – *if* he does not transform revelation into philosophy (Hegel) and thus sacrifice revelation to philosophy.

<sup>1</sup>Theologian accepts philosophy<sup>1</sup> – can do it, if he believes that philosophy is *permitted*, that it is justified on the *basis* of revelation. Philosophy thus permitted, thus admitted, is necessarily a humble hand-maid of theology, and not *the* queen of the sciences. |

Nature of alternative allows only of *subordination*, *not* of coordination. *One* demand is right or wrong: for each claims to be *the* one thing needful. N 2 verso

3) *Objection*: does philosophy not imply unbearable dogmatism? does it not imply a *limine* rejection of revelation? of faith? is philosophy not love of truth, and is a *limine* rejection not sign of insincerity? Philosophy *is* love of truth, i.e. of *evident* truth.

Precisely for this reason, it is of the essence of the philosopher to *suspend* his judgment, and *not* to assent, in all cases in which assent would be based on insufficient evidence.

Whoever is incapable of suspending his judgment in such cases, of *living* in such suspense, whoever fails to know that

*doubt* is a good pillow for a well-constructed head, cannot be a philosopher.

But *life* requires *decisions* – this is not exact: *action* does – but who said that the life of philosophy is a life of action? The philosophic answer to the pragmatist objection was given by Goethe: der Handelnde ist immer gewissenlos – *quâ* acting man (or as Aristotle says: *quâ* *merely* human beings) we have to accept unevident premises – but this merely shows the inferiority of action.

***Transition to the decisive difficulty.***

Philosophy could accept revelation only if revelation were an evident, demonstrable fact. For all practical purposes: if revelation could be proved by *historical* evidence.

But revelation cannot be proved by historical evidence.

Coincidence of the teaching of the Reformers with modern historical criticism.

Modern historical criticism has not refuted belief in revelation – but it has refuted historical *argument* allegedly proving the fact of revelation. But this it has really done. I

N g recto ***Revelation cannot refute philosophy.***

A large number of arguments – I shall mention here only the most popular ones.

*Political* argument: *social* need of revelation > stable order; inability of philosophy to establish moral standards (Socrates cannot refute Calicles etc.) –

Proves *at best* necessity of *myth* of revelation (noble lie).

<sup>14</sup> *Misery of man without God*: but – Socrates (consolation, not M[isery] due to envy, limited to Epicurus, Stoics).<sup>14</sup>

*Moral* argument: inferiority of philosophic morality as compared with Biblical morality (its eudemonism; placere sibi ipsi ≠ placere Deo; self-assertion vs. self-denial – to love God with all one's heart vs. to love with all one's heart the perfection of one's understanding).

Yet: the criterion *itself* can be questioned – viz. the *radical* moral demand, the insistence on absolute purity of intentions.

*All* arguments of faith against philosophy *presuppose* faith: they are circular.



Revelation has no support other than revelation: the only book written in defense of the Bible is the Bible itself (Lessing)

<sup>1</sup> Or: Newman's "I know, I know."<sup>1</sup>

Since revelation has no support outside itself, since its arguments are circular, philosophy can disregard revelation.

### *Philosophy cannot refute revelation.*

Again limited to most popular aspects. Fundamental difference between: refutation of *adherents* of revelation (= human beings) and refutation of revelation (= God) – cf. Calvin: *se nobiscum litigare fingunt*.

The famous refutation of Genesis 1 by modern geology – the *wrong* answer is: the Bible is not a scientific book, but concerned only with matters of faith and manners – for: faith and science overlap, e.g. in the question of miracles – if the Bible is not to be taken seriously in matters concerning physical world and events in it, may be the Biblical reports go back to people incapable of exact observation etc.<sup>45</sup> The good and decisive answer is this: all scientific arguments against the Biblical account of creation etc. *presuppose* the impossibility of miracles (events which according to science must have required billions of years, are miraculously possible in a split second) – i.e. they beg the question.

Or: Biblical criticism – the arguments *presuppose* the impossibility of verbal inspiration: it was impossible for *Moses* to describe<sup>46</sup> events occurring centuries after his death, but not for God to inspire to him the truth etc.

The multiplicity of revelations – they refute each other – a particularly shallow argument: for |

1) if *una est religio in rituum varietate*, if every revealed religion is a *human* interpretation of the call of God, the variety of human interpretations does not do away with the fact that a personal God freely and mysteriously calls men to Himself. It is true, this would presuppose an attitude of radical *tolerance*. But this is not even necessary; for:

2) scandals *must* come, heresies *must* come – it is of the essence of revelation to be constantly challenged by pseudo-revelations, heresies etc.

N 3 verso

***Why revelation cannot refute philosophy, and vice versa.***

Generally:

a) human knowledge is always so limited that the *possibility* of revelation cannot be refuted<sup>47</sup>, and *need* for revelation cannot be denied.

b) revelation is always so uncertain that it can be rejected, and man is so constructed that he can find his satisfaction, his happiness, in investigation, in the progress of clarity.

***Conclusions to be drawn from this state of affairs.***

***First suggestion – neutrality is superior to the alternatives –***  
neutrality means:

a) our thesis can be proved to both, whereas neither of the 2 opposed theses<sup>18</sup> – right of revelation and right of philosophy – can be proved to the other.

b) attempt to *understand*, to do *justice* to both positions.

Deplorable state of mutual appreciation. Believers are rightly shocked by what philosophers say, or intimate, regarding revelation, and philosophers can only shrug their shoulders about what believers say about philosophy.

(Cf. Spinoza on Bible; Pascal on Epicureans – Stoics; Nietzsche on Bible as resentment; Kierkegaard on Socrates as distinguished from Plato. As regards Thomas, a *problem* is shown by Luther's dissatisfaction with scholastic theology.)

One could say that the very fact that each side has tried to refute the other, reveals<sup>49</sup> a<sup>50</sup> deep misunderstanding.

But: neutrality is a *philosophic* attitude > victory of philosophy.

The very insight into the *limitations* of philosophy is a victory of philosophy: because it is an *insight*. |

N 4 recto

Yet:

***Second suggestion: Problematic basis of philosophy is revealed by its inability to refute revelation.***

Revelation or faith is *not* compelled, by its principle, to *refute* philosophy. But philosophy is – threatened by the very possibility of revelation which it cannot refute: philosophy cannot leave it at a *defence*; it *must* attack.

Why is philosophy threatened by the very possibility of revelation?

I a. *The* alternative is philosophy or revelation, i.e. what *ultimately* counts is either divine guidance or human guidance; if there is no divine guidance, human guidance is *the* One Thing needful.

The other way round: if there is revelation, philosophy becomes something infinitely unimportant – the *possibility* of revelation implies the *possible meaninglessness* of philosophy. If the possibility of revelation remains an open question, the *significance of philosophy* remains an open question.

Therefore, philosophy stands and falls by the contention that philosophy is the One Thing Needful, or the highest possibility of man. <sup>1</sup>Philosophy cannot claim less: it cannot afford being modest.<sup>1</sup>

b. But philosophy cannot refute the possibility of revelation. Hence, philosophy is *not* necessarily the One Thing Needful; hence the choice of philosophy is based, not on evident or rational necessity, but on an unevident, a fundamentally *blind* decision. The claim of philosophy is plausible, but not cogent; it is verisimile, but not verum.

The *claim* of philosophy that it<sup>51</sup> wisely suspends its judgment, whereas faith boldly or rashly decides, is untenable; for philosophy *itself* rests on a decision.

If philosophy cannot justify itself as a rational *necessity*, a life devoted to the quest for evident knowledge rests *itself* on an unevident assumption – but this confirms the thesis of faith that there is no possibility of *consistency*, of a *consistent life* without faith or belief in revelation. |

II. One might suggest this way out: philosophy does not have to prove the *impossibility* of revelation; for the possibility of revelation is so remote, so infinitely remote that it is not a practical proposition. N 4 verso

This argument is becoming for business-men, but it is a disgrace – I do not say for philosophers – but for anyone who claims ever to have come [with]in hailing distance of philosophy or science.

Philosophy cannot prove that revelation is impossible; hence it cannot prove *more* than that revelation is most *improbable* or radically *uncertain*. But this is so far from being a

refutation of revelation, that it is not even *relevant*: it is the very *boast* of revelation to be a *miracle*, hence most improbable and most uncertain. 'Philosophy implies the refusal to accept, or to adhere to, whatever is not *evident*, but revelation is per se inevident; ergo philosophy does not *refute* the claim of revelation; it begs the question; it rests on a *dogmatic* assumption. No specific *argument* of philosophy, but simply the philosophic criterion of truth *settles* the issue. Philosophy presupposes *itself*.'

Philosophy rejects revelation because of its uncertainty – but uncertainty is of the *essence* of revelation – revelation *denies* the philosophic criterion of truth (everything which is incapable of being made manifest, is suspect; αὐτοψία; evident necessity . . .). Philosophy rejects revelation, philosophy asserts its own *necessity*, on the *basis* of the philosophic criterion of truth: the justification of philosophy is *circular* – i.e. it is a scandal.

On the basis of its initial *hypothesis* (that philosophy is the highest possibility of man), philosophy can maintain itself *easily* against the claim of revelation – but it cannot deny that this basic premise is, and is bound to remain, a *hypothesis*.

I conclude: the fact that revelation cannot refute philosophy and vice versa, decides in favor of revelation. Or: the impossibility of neutrality between revelation and philosophy decides in favor of revelation.

'(Consider this: revelation cannot be proved – but philosophy can be proved: it can be proved that man does philosophize; the *fact* of philosophy can be proved, whereas the fact of revelation *cannot*.)' |

N 5 recto

*Consequence for philosophy*: appears if we restate the problem as follows: Philosophy is the highest possibility of man, if there is no revelation; but there is no revelation, because there can never be evident *knowledge* of the fact of revelation. The argument presupposes the tacit identification of "being" with "evidently knowable." Philosophy is essentially "idealistic" (Laberthonnière, L'idéalisme grec et le réalisme chrétien<sup>VIII</sup>).

VIII [The title that Strauss cites from memory reads: Lucien Laberthonnière, *Le réalisme chrétien et l'idéalisme grec* (Paris 1904) – cf. letter to Gerhard Krüger from March 14, 1933, *Gesammelte Schriften* 3, p. 427.]

It is *this* fact which gave rise to Kant's Critique of pure reason, to his distinction between the phenomenon and the Thing-in-itself: Kant's "idealism" is an *attack* on the "idealism" of classical philosophy. <sup>1</sup> But cf. Plato on ἀσθένεια τοῦ λόγου.<sup>1</sup>

A philosophy which believes that it can refute the possibility of revelation – and a philosophy which does not believe that: *this* is the real meaning of la querelle des anciens et des modernes.

The consequence for philosophy: radical revision of fundamental reflections of classical philosophy (man = animal rationale – his perfection = philosophy etc.) along the lines of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason.

***Third suggestion*<sup>52</sup> – the Greek philosopher would answer along these lines –**

Philosophy does not need revelation, but revelation needs philosophy: philosophy refuses to be called before tribunal of revelation, but revelation *must* recognize the tribunal of philosophy. For adherents of revelation may *say* credo quia absurdum, they cannot *mean* it; they can be forced to admit that the objects of faith must be *possible* – but the elaboration of what is possible or not, is the sake of *philosophy*.<sup>IX</sup>

But the cognizance of philosophy is not limited to *possible* things, for there is human knowledge of actual things. Since both philosophy and faith make assertions about *actual* things, there is a possibility of *conflict* and of *refutation* of one by the other. <sup>1</sup> Faith as faith *must* make assertions which can be *checked* by unbelievers – it *must* be based at<sup>53</sup> some point on alleged or real *knowledge* – but that "knowledge" is *necessarily* only *alleged* knowledge, owing to the *basic* fallacy, of faith, the attribution of *absolute* importance to *morality* (the pure heart).<sup>1</sup>

To *exclude* the possibility of refutation radically, there is only one way: that faith has no basis whatever in human knowledge of actual things. This view of faith is not the Jewish and the Catholic one. It was prepared by the Reformers and reaches its climax in Kierkegaard. Whereas the Reformation stands and

IX [The English phrase "is the sake of philosophy" is explained and is to be understood as a rendering of the German "ist Sache der Philosophie" (is the task or subject matter of philosophy).]



N 5 verso

falls by the absolute truth of the Bible, i.e. of a book which is subject to various kinds of human investigations, *Kierkegaard* took away this last link between the realm of actual knowledge and the realm of faith. He says (*Philosophical Fragments* 87): for faith it would have been more than enough if the generation contemporary with Jesus had<sup>54</sup> left nothing behind than these words: "We have believed that in such and such a year God appeared among us in the humble figure of a servant, that he lived and taught in our community, and finally died." If we disregard the difficulty that one would have to *know* that "this little advertisement" *really* goes back to the contemporaries of Jesus, can faith on *such* a basis be defended against the objection that "assentire his quae sunt fidei, est levitatis" (S.c.G. I 6)? And if this is so, must we not admit the possibility of refutation of one by the other and hence start the discussion all over again? or rather, *begin* the discussion by taking up the *concrete* problems to which I could barely allude tonight?<sup>55</sup>

In conclusion, I would like to name<sup>56</sup> that man to whom I owe, so to say, everything I have been able to discern in the labyrinth of that grave question: Lessing. I do not mean the Lessing of a certain tradition, the Lessing celebrated by a certain type of oratory, but the true and unknown Lessing. Lessing's attitude was characterized by an innate disgust against compromises in serious, i.e. theoretical, matters: he rejected Socinianism, enlightened Christianity (of which one does not know where it is Christian and where it is enlightened) and deism, and he would have rejected German idealism as well (as Jacobi vs. Schelling shows). He admitted only<sup>1</sup> this alternative: orthodoxy (in his case Lutheran, of course) or Spinoza (i.e. philosophy, for there is no philosophy other than that of Spinoza). He decided in favor of philosophy. – Why he took this step, he has indicated in more than one passage of his writings – but in none, I think, more clearly than in this (*Antiqu. Briefe* 45 end) with which he concludes his discussion of the different treatment of <sup>1</sup>perspective in ancient and in modern painting<sup>1</sup>:

"We see more than the ancients; and yet our eyes might possibly be poorer than the eyes of the ancients; the ancients saw less than we; but their eyes might have been more<sup>57</sup>

discerning than ours. – I fear that the whole comparison of the ancients and the moderns would lead to this result.”

<sup>1</sup> Possibility of refutation of revelation implied in Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy. What their specific argument is, we cannot say before we have understood their whole teaching. Since I cannot claim to have achieved this, I must leave the issue open.<sup>1</sup>

### Text-Critical Notes

[ ] contains additions by the editor.

<> indicates deletions by Leo Strauss.

1. Inserted or added by Leo Strauss between the lines or in the margins.
2. < are >
3. < he >
4. < can >
5. < demonstration >
6. Ms.: preying
7. < According to its original me[aning] > The
8. [The title and the beginning of point 5 first read as follows and then were immediately discarded by LS:] < 5) *Philosophy must assert that revelation is impossible*. Philosophy asserts that the one thing needful is philosophizing. This assertion is contradicted by the teaching of revelation. The philosopher must therefore *refute* the teaching of revelation. More than that: he must prove the *impossibility* of revelation. For if revelation is *possible*, it is possible that the philosophic enterprise is fundamentally wrong. >
9. < subtle >
10. < prove >
11. < implies >
12. his < literary > < textual ><sup>1</sup>
13. < divorced >
14. < Also, > a God
15. as < the cause of all things the fully<sup>1</sup> intelligible >
16. us. < They would say the thing >
17. < it >
18. < can >
19. limit < creati >
20. < creation as >
21. in < God >
22. < less than most other theologians >
23. < admits >
24. and < that >
25. < whether >

26. say < in this case >
27. < My contention is th >
28. < will >
29. < (Theaet. in pri >
30. more < than >
31. < *refute* >
32. explanation < would therefore be >
33. Ms.: 423
34. < divine >
35. *right* < that >
36. < the >
37. his < word is >
38. < the just >
39. the < dark >
40. < the tree > becomes
41. < It would be ridiculed as gentleman's view > [Then in a new line:] Biblical
42. < Bible seems to apply this to God. > – a
43. < man >
44. [Inserted between the lines in pencil. The first four words in the brackets are especially difficult to decipher, particularly as *M.* looks to be only an abbreviation. The commas after *consolation* and *envy* have been added by the editor so as to allow the thought, which Strauss noted for himself in an extremely condensed form, to become more comprehensible.]
45. etc. ' < Applied to > '
46. describe < this to >
47. < denied, and >
48. Ms.: thesis
49. < shows >
50. < that >
51. it < suspends >
52. [In the Ms. *Third suggestion* is underlined, unlike in the case of *First suggestion* and *Second suggestion* previously, not once, but twice, and thus is given special emphasis.]
53. Ms.: on
54. had < nothing >
55. [Noted in this connection in the lower margin and then crossed out:] < Die kleinen Zettel a) und b). > [= Small slips of paper a) and b).]
56. < mention >
57. < better >